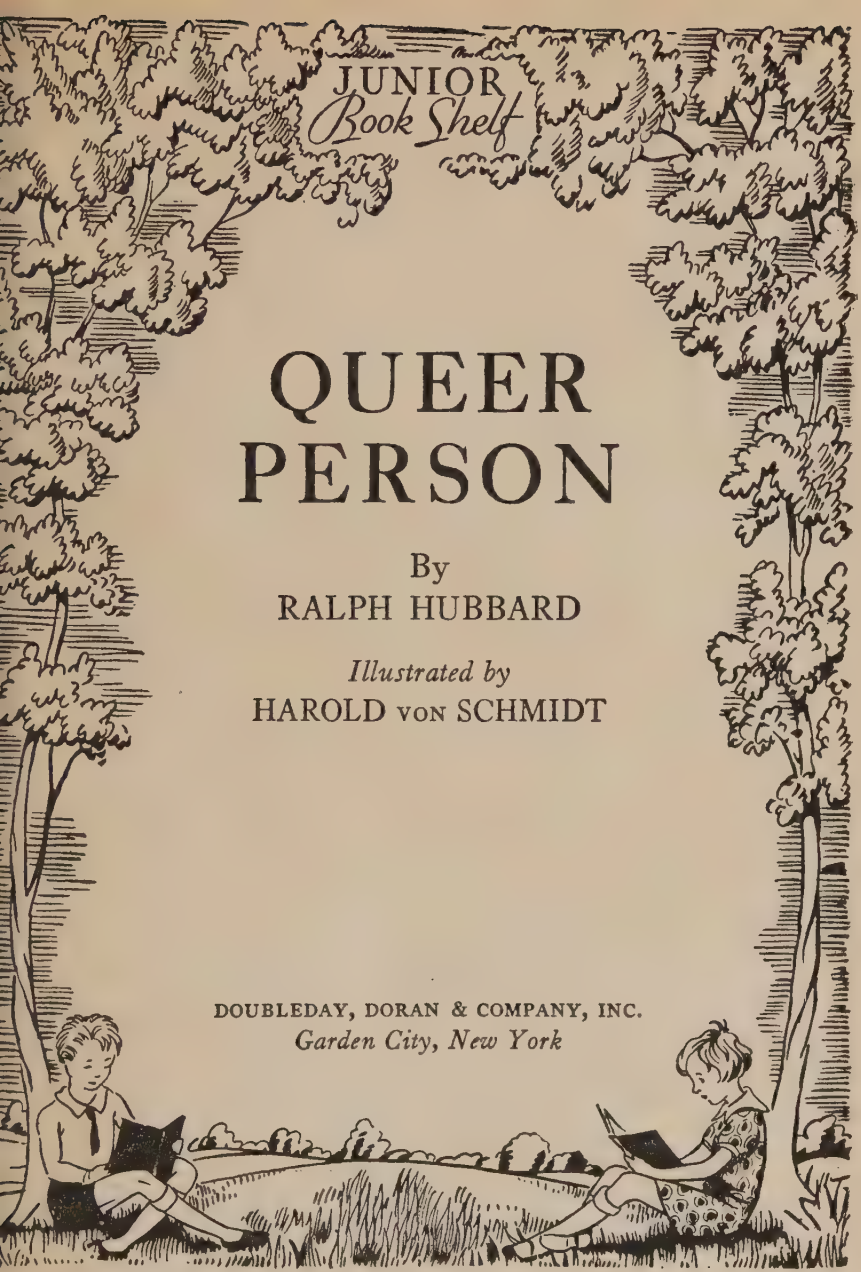
QUEER PERSON

PANIC WOULD HAVE LENT HER WINGS!



QUEER PERSON

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DEDICATED
TO MY MOTHER

BERTHA C. HUBBARD

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to make grateful and sincere acknowledgment to Mr. James Willard Schultz, who so generously allowed us to use the title and some points of character in describing the life of this Indian boy.

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QUEER PERSON

CHAPTER I

It Might Be a Man Some Day

THERE really was not so much snow on the ground, after all; and, at that, it was a powdery sort that scarcely impeded progress. But the cold was intense, and the early sun blinding. A deadly stillness ruled, more potent by contrast, because only a few hours previously a howling Montana blizzard had swept the land from the northwest. Here and there some courageous woman had ventured forth to shift the flap poles, but most of the smoke "ears" were still overlapped, and thin strings of bluish smoke rose straight and undisturbed into the sky. Elliptical doors of hide supported by willow hoops were for the most part still securely tied down. Neutral, echoless sounds came through the chill atmosphere from time to time: the scream of the river as an angry crevice zigzagged its course over bulging ice; the sharp staccato of a splitting

cottonwood which had ceased to resist the freezing temperature. From the distance came the lowing of game herds—buffalo. Not a man, not a dog, not a horse was in sight. The first two were safely housed in the lodges as yet, while the latter could be found with a bit of searching, huddled against cut banks, absorbing the scant heat reflected thereby.

But something was astir. It was not a dog, it was not a horse; however, it might be a man some day if good fortune tended its trail. Strange, quite shapeless, resembling some animal unheard of, was this little being. It wore a ragged remnant of a buffalo robe roped around its middle, most of which robe was trailing away aft, like some huge flat tail. This small dark object was just passing the first tepees of Big Pipe's village. For two miles the conically shaped dwellings were strung along the river bottom. The small object was picked up by a pair of inquisitive eyes peering over the top of a door cloth. The eyes were those of a woman, who called to her neighbor, and this neighbor in turn repeated the call, until finally there was a panoramic sequence of slight movements at the entrances of many lodges. A

high soprano voice, so characteristic among the red women, hailed the amorphous traveler, but gained nothing. The wee beggar, for this was what the strange pedestrian proved to be, continued his unsteady course. He paid no heed whatever, but trudged on, touseled head bent slightly forward, eyes on the white ground.

To the vast interest of his audience, the little person steered for the door of the third tepee, where the door cloth had been raised, and many an onlooker was quite consumed with curiosity upon seeing him crawl over the bottom lacing pins and be swallowed up by the shadowy interior. Here he straightened up, blinked owlishly, then waddled straight to the fire where he knelt with outstretched hands. The family on whom he had descended so unceremoniously at this early hour gaped with amazement. All, from the father with pipe poised in hand before his mouth, the mother who had been observing from above the door cloth, on down through several stages of copper midgets, simply stood. Speech was dead for moments. At last the mother uttered a sharp question:

"Who are you?"

Not only did the visitor remain silent, but he did not so much as move his head. Walking to the fire, the woman took him by the arm and gently shook him, repeating her question. This time the child, whom she judged to be about four winters, favored her with a long, expressionless stare; then, dropping his gaze, turned once more to the yellow blazes. The woman next tested him with food, and this time the reaction was sudden and certain, for the child snatched at the meat with avid hands. Having eaten, amid the silence of his hosts, he made a deliberate survey of the room, crawled over to a huddle of dogs near the door, pushed them apart, and proceeded to place himself in the warm space thus created. Sleep seized him in short order. The lord of the domicile, who had stolidly smoked while watching this bit of drama, now removed his pipe and indulged in several toothy peals of laughter. The woman's mystification verged on annoyance when her lord voiced his amusement.

A neighbor woman, burning with curiosity, entered. A deal of high-pitched chatter ensued. This drew other visitors, men and women, but none seemed to lend any light on the dominant

question: Whence came this silent, larval specimen of humanity with unkempt hair and ragged attire, especially in weather like this? The family watched the sleeper. When the sun was high the dogs went out; and the boy, becoming chilled, awoke and again moved to the domestic center of activity, the fire. Being rested and comfortable, he granted the hosts of his temporary home a series of wondering gazes, but no manner of advance could elicit a sign of a voice. When shadows began to slant eastward an old woman who had come to investigate studied the tiny stranger severely, then with wagging head and sage tone remarked to the matron:

"You should put that child out; he is controlled by a black spirit. See, he does not speak, he does not hear us; his real spirit may not be there at all, and we may be looking at some sort of ghost!"

Rising volume and pitch accompanied this last, so that the final words were almost a shrill scream. Then, holding her robe over her head, the speaker fled. The family was frozen, panic-stricken, staring at each other and their visitor. Taking on life suddenly, the woman seized the

lad and thrust him without further to do out the door.

Finding himself out in the glittering, cold world again, the ragged waif shaded his eyes with a tiny, dirty hand, looked back at the unfriendly, bristling door—for his exit had been somewhat rough!—stifled the hint of a sob; then, quite unmindful of a large, scattered audience before the lodges, sought his way chubbishly through the snow farther down into the village, his robe smoothing out his trail as he proceeded.

Word of this queer, little pinched soul had spread during the day with almost incredible swiftness. As he made his way down through the village, past groups at the entrances of lodges, door hoops were held down fast, lest he seek to enter. The journey was considerably delayed because of the frequent salutations of curious dogs who trotted out to have a friendly smell. Many of these canines stood waggingly to receive rather illy-directed pats from square and very brown hands. But people noticed that these greetings were all voiceless on both sides.

Only a moment or two remained before Old Sun would be gone. Already the chill of the

Rocky Mountain winter night was creeping into all living things. Passers-by hunched their robes higher about their ears. In some cases a big roll of the woolly buffalo robe covered half the head.

One middle-aged matron with perhaps less fear or superstition than her neighbors—or might be her fears were eclipsed for the moment by curiosity; who knows?—left her door where she had been covertly watching the approach of the roundly heralded little visitor. She took him gently by the hand and led him into her abode, leaving a highly amazed and alarmed populace to gape at each other in a style that plainly said: "Feature that!"

His captor was a corpulent, jovial-faced mother who had no children at home any more, and so was less concerned over possible plagues and spells being cast. She was disrobing him before the fire, ready for bed. Plains Indians roll themselves into their robes against the warm wool, quite naked, and hence run little chance of being chilled even in the severest of weather. Turning to her husband who was watching this little scene interestedly, and who, meantime, was ready to welcome anything that would tend to

break the monotony of the long winter camp, she said:

"They say he does not talk. Watch me. I shall make him talk if anybody can!" She removed his rags and warmed him before the fire, feeling over his legs and arms thoughtfully. "Why, he has not been starved! Gossip had him mere bones!"

She traced with one finger a deep scar that loomed on his left shoulder blade. Slowly the little fellow settled back into her spacious lap, leaning against the big form. The woman combed out his ratty hair with a brush constructed from the tail of a porcupine. Then came food, plenty of it. After this came a period of devoted, motherly pattings, caressings, and bits of "nothing songs." Suddenly the woman held him away from her while she searched his meaningless moon face long and seriously. Alas! the big black eyes rewarded her with not even one little crinkle of a smile.

"It's wrong in its head," said the woman sadly, shaking her own head meanwhile. "Perhaps all this talk is true. I did so want to keep him."

But when the sun looked upon the white world again, and dogs dared to stretch themselves in

the now well-beaten trails running before the tepees, the good woman dressed the child in warmer leggings and moccasins, tied the ragged bit of robe securely about his little middle, and started him on his way. This, however, was not without a long wistful look at his retreating back.

And several days passed in which the small stranger was variously entertained, sometimes briefly, brusquely, and almost cruelly. But he lived. His silence and stolidity, so different from the fashion of the usual Indian babe of his age, gained him the title of "Queer Person."

Since his canvassing had been pretty thorough, only a few tepees remained. His rounds brought him near the chief's lodge, at which time the populace watched with more than wonted interest.

Big Pipe, the chieftain, requires a little special mention. First off, since humanity is made of clay and straw, yea, silver and gold, too, one may begin by saying that this old man of sixty winters was a far cry from the life of savagery and strife in the midst of which he had his being. He was whole lifetimes ahead of his race at the juncture in which we take up the thread. Tall,

lean, deliberate, thoughtful, kindly, he was feared by the rebellious and undisciplined and loved almost to idolatry by his friends. Fully three fourths of the people called him "Father," men and women, old and young. As a pacifier, he had been famous this long time. A stranger might find him winding his way among the people at all times, armed only with his ceremonial fan, long pipe bag, and deep resonant voice. Broad of face, high, aristocratic of nose and brow, mouth wide and generous, his countenance was at once handsome and distinguished.

Big Pipe spoke always with deliberation and never at length. "Have you consulted the chief? Does your plan please the Father? Better wait until Big Pipe passes on that." These were the words of the people, and his advice was always good. But, aside from these things, this man was noted for having dictated a policy in his band that had reached the ears of even hostiles far beyond the mountains, namely that of causing the rich to partly support the poor. It was all done through a very good-natured ruse.

Once a year did he hold a "He-gives-it-away Feast" at which time he and his family gave away

THE LITTLE PERSON STEERED FOR THE DOOR OF THE THIRD TEPEE, WHERE THE DOOR CLOTH HAD BEEN RAISED

all their possessions except the oldest of clothes —which they donned—the ceremonial fan, pipe and bag, and the splendid bonnet of golden eagle plumes with its two trailing tails. Horses, traveling equipment, clothes, robes, parfleches, food, trinkets—all were parceled out among the old and needy. The royal family would then spend one night of fasting, sleeping in the grass like the most humble. So great was the affection in which the people held this man and his that next morning the chief and his family would find themselves again the possessors of a fine big white lodge well equipped, even to luxury, and horses picketed at the entrance. The custom was so established that this had become one of the functions of the year, and people prepared for it as for a regular holiday. There was much laughter and sport accompanying these He-gives-it-away Feasts. Some took advantage of it, but never a second time. The tribe saw to it that these latter were deprived of many of life's commonest joys.

Big Pipe's early domestic life was o'ershadowed; children and wives had been called to the sand-hills, and it was with the tenderest of care that we find him watching over his beautiful

young wife, almost thirty winters his junior, and their little daughter, a plump little thing given to much laughter and endless, meaningless chatter. "Goes-before," the young mother, having heard of Queer Person, was not surprised when the waif appeared in her vicinity.

Strange to say, in spite of predictions and fears, no calamity had as yet befallen any household that had entertained him. Fearing she might brook the displeasure of the bad spirits supposed to inhabit the little boy, the mother stood aside, not interfering in any way with the entrance of the lad as he crawled over the lower lacing pins of her doorway and made for the fire. This was a beautiful lodge—large, white, and well equipped. A dew cloth or curtain hung about the margins of the room. On this were painted various pictograph stories concerned with Big Pipe's life. It was known well enough that at least two or three nights' lodging would be had in this home, unless some very unforetold event intervened.

Bedrabbled and wet from the snow, the child was a pitiable enough object. All this soon altered, for once fed from the family meat pot he promptly went to sleep in the arms of his hostess.

The hard little countenance had not been read by anyone, and long did the young mother study it, the eyes of her liege lord upon her the while. Years of squinting in prairie light, plus tepee smoke, gave the chief the appearance of one half asleep, but Goes-before was not deceived by that scrutiny. A slow smile spread over the old visage, but he puffed his pipe in silence.

"Were he not an idiot with no thoughts in his head at all, I'd say he was sent to us," spoke up Goes-before.

"Who proves he is an idiot?" asked Big Pipe in his kindly tones, chest tones, that quality found in most Indian speech. His wife continued to search the features of the sleeping child, but finally asked, more of herself than of her husband:

"What else could keep him so silent and cold of eye? Yet his body is straight and well lined. He will be a strong man if he lives." Rising, she placed him in a bed of robes by himself, remarking the time: "But we can't keep him. It would not be safe. Evil spirits would be sure to cast a shadow over our little Singing Moon."

"It is for you to say," replied the chief as he puffed the long stemmed pipe, his mind already

on some remote topic. On the second morning Queer Person was once more set adrift. Tongues wagged.

"I knew she would not keep him after I told her what dangers would lurk in the deed," said one.

"Yes, but I told her first," said another.

Three lodges remained in all that great village, and after that there would be no road open to the waif but the great white spaces rolling away, not to one horizon, but to many. The morning was crisp and biting, the sun not yet up. Goes-before hunched her robe more snugly about her shoulders as she sadly watched the boy toddle his way toward the next tepee, quite unmindful of the possible fate ahead of him, trudging along for all the world as if he were playing a nice game from lodge to lodge instead of a game with Old Cold Maker and Death for partners.

The last lodge was not inviting, yet his childish eye drew no distinctions. Stooping his funny little form, the boy negotiated the doorway and perceived a group of four big dogs banked around the sleeping person of an old woman. He made for this group, pushed the dogs apart, and nestled

himself into the warm space. The old hag, shivering, moved restlessly, but did not actually awaken, since she apparently considered the movement that of the dogs, due to their habit of constantly shifting positions.

So there lay the child, comfortable but wide awake, his gimlet eyes searching every crevice of this raggedest of lodges.

CHAPTER II

Nobody Loved Old Granny

When the sun came up a slender shaft of light found its way through a slit in the skin lodge cover and, as luck would have it, hit the hag square in the face, whereat she promptly sat up, all her faculties alert after the manner of wild creatures. Tipping her leathern face up toward the smoke vent, she stretched and yawned. Suddenly her beady eyes dropped on the countenance of the little waif cuddled among her dogs and at the same time so close to her. Long he returned her stare; then she dragged him up before her with hands that resembled hooks and claws, so many years had they toiled in soil and heat and snow and cold. Her neck was stringy, her nose too long, her gums untenanted except for two yellow teeth, and they did not hit. Shaking the little one the while, she wailed in cracked, broken tones of age:

"Rat, what are you doing here?" Receiving no reply, she stood him on his feet. "Can't you answer me? Perhaps you are an owl and can't talk in daylight." Then began to percolate down through Granny's memory, certain gossip regarding the mysterious appearance of a parentless child in the camp—an idiot, to be exact. "Someone has put this little thing in my lodge that an old worn soul may be tormented. Oh, well, I'll turn him out presently." And with that she carefully tucked him back among the dogs. Then she busied herself about the lodge, grumbling about not being able to feed herself and dogs, let alone bringing in another person.

First she attempted in a feeble way to close certain apertures about the base of her lodge cover, which cover was most scant and deficient, especially at the ground line. Meantime the whole structure was so small that she could scarcely stand upright in it, but this did not matter so materially, since her figure more nearly resembled that of a small pine at timber line. Not without pain did she collect fire materials at her hearth, where soon a tiny yellow blaze was to be seen. Next, a small three-legged kettle was un-

tied from poles aloft where it had been placed out of dogs' reach, and the frozen remains of yesterday's soup was placed on the hearth rocks to thaw. Having the fire at a brisk, crackling stage, the woman stepped out, and instantly the child was deserted, for the dogs were at her side. Nothing to do but creep out with the rest of this strange family, invited or not.

"Humph! An idiot!" snarled Granny as she gave him a passing glance.

Then off she set for faggots, leaning heavily on her staff. Having gathered a bulk of cottonwood branches and dead twigs, she fastened them with a short rope and trudged back with the load on her back, dogs following. Laying down her load, having half forgot the little visitor, she was amazed to see him standing at her feet, his stolid little face peering up into her own weathered visage without a glimmer of fear, while in his soiled little brown hands he was holding a tiny bundle of twigs all his own. An onlooker would have realized that a smile was attempting to be born on the old woman's face. It was a withered smile.

"Pretty good for an idiot," she remarked, and straightway became absorbed in her labor of

smashing up the wood. To her utter amazement she saw the child lay his twigs on the ground in imitation of her own act and walk on them. This time Granny placed both hands on her lame old back and partly straightened up.

"Who says this child is an idiot?" she rasped, looking about for contradictions, but there were none; people had quite forgot her little world by now in the pursuance of their own affairs. Besides, very old people and the otherwise very wretched were sometimes of little consequence when a beautiful day ruled overhead and the men were destined to ride their bony horses after buffalo that were traveling through snow too deep for escape.

Hearing a half animal, half human little sound near her skirts, Granny looked down to catch a glimpse of one of her dogs in the act of casting a surreptitious lick over the little one's face. Expecting to see him cry, she was interested to find him chuckling and the little features for once wreathed in smiles. He attempted to catch the dog, and this was the sign for a romp. All the dogs joined, and soon the little fellow found himself rolled good-naturedly on the ground,

where he took refuge by hiding his face in his arms. Much snuffling and nose poking about his ears ensued, and at last some rough pulling on the scrap of robe that served for a coat brought Granny to the rescue. The child was laughing outright by now! She gathered him up tight against her sterile breast and took comfort as only the extremely lonely and destitute can, half weeping the while, for this was the first bit of light fun that had come into her meager existence this many a winter. A few meaningless endearments followed.

"They say you are an idiot! a thing empty in its head, but I know, I know it all. You are only deaf like trees and dumb like hills. I'll keep you until to-morrow and then put you out, for, oh, how could I ever feed you?"

Nobody loved old Granny. She talked too much. Her tongue had always been the sharpest and most unsparing among the Pikuni. A certain bullying element, of the kind found in every community, made a favorite pastime of annoying the helpless creature merely to get her to throwing sticks, stones, and evil words. Her brave dogs had saved her from actual bodily injury on more

than one occasion. When they were not handy matters took a cruel course. The chief and a certain young warrior by the name of Middle Rider, his brother-in-law, in fact, brought timely interference whenever they were home, seeing to it that not one single coarse taunt was perpetrated.

Toward sunset on the day that Queer Person elected to make the meanest tepee in the village his temporary stopping place, Big Pipe sent over the better part of an elk quarter. The child watched intently as Granny hoisted the meat into the high branches of a friendly cottonwood with a much mended rope. The end of this rope was fastened to a peg just under the edge of the lodge cover near the pile of leaves and grass and one scrap of buffalo robe that served for a bed. Should a thief molest that rope either the dogs or the old woman herself would most certainly be aroused.

But the meat was there in the morning. With frugal partaking the homely round of daily responsibilities was commenced. To-day was brilliant, and a welcome thaw had cleared much of the prairie of its white cover, so that herdsboys took the horses out into the open hills. Granny

unearthed an irregular and very untidy piece of tanned elk hide that served as a sack in which she gathered various sorts of small materials from time to time. This day was clear enough for a foraging trip, so off she limped on her staff, the dogs having been ordered to remain behind to guard the lodge. But the little boy followed as best he could. In a bend of the river, deep in the brush, Granny pried up an old log with her cudgel. There she found the storehouse in one place and the nest in another, all belonging to a most active little rodent, the short-tailed meadow mouse. A runway marked the path from food to nest. Among the little food articles were to be found many things which, when ground up and cooked, would prove to contain nutriment fit for the diet of these poor, storm-driven people.

Hawthorn apples, rose hips, buffalo berries, sunflower seeds, pine seeds, grass bulbs, and wild leeks—all were most tempting to the thrifty old woman. But she took only a part of the store, saying aloud to the little animal—which might be nowhere in sight—as she did so: "Pity, now, Little Brother, an old woman and help her to live the winter through." Replacing the log, she

sought another such larder. On one of these occasions the child grabbed her sleeve and jerked violently, pointing as the mouse ran from the food collection to the nest. Granny well understood and merely grunted as she kept on with her work:

"Humph! pretty good for an idiot!"

At last they turned back toward the village. Upon nearing their own lodge the child ran ahead to meet the now advancing dogs, which latter were all agog with much tail wagging. The sight touched ever so faintly some dried-up well of thought and emotion, so that the promised dismissal became a rather painful notion. The old woman rid herself of the responsibility by merely saying: "Humph! may as well wait till tomorrow."

And many morrows came, only to go as other days, yet they lived on somehow, and postponement came to be so regular that it assumed a certain monotony. Once another old woman assayed rendering some advice as regards the dangers of keeping the child, not only to herself, but to the neighbors and the whole village. Who could tell what awful possibility might lie in the

concealed evil spirit that possessed the child? This officious soul reaped, for her pains, such a harvest of calumny that she fled in terror, leaving Granny still waving her arms at no one in particular.

The child never did leave; he stayed always. And what marvelous benefits came to each of their lives because of this strange association of discards you shall certainly hear.

CHAPTER III

Time Was When She Could Dress Six Buffalo in a Day and Still Laugh at Night

TIME is a stealthy old thing and comes on people unawares. Suppose in addition to advancing age one must also face a period of excruciating, painful combat with elements and starvation each winter, just as certain as winter arrives? And suppose the balance of one's human firmament so disliked one that to maintain body and soul spelled a struggle almost as severe as the one with the elements? This actual dislike for Granny percolated down from above. So many parents disliked her that small wonder growing children and bullying rowdies tormented her. Practical jokes almost too coarse and cruel for repetition filled Granny's life with terror. Young riders had even gone so far as to rope from loping horses the top of her tepee poles and upset the whole structure, often tearing the cover so that the chief's family

had to take her in for the night. Through the ever-ready instinct of self-preservation, so irascible became her nature and so pestilential her tongue that many considered her quite insane. Her soul was as warped as her exterior. Never was she seen abroad without her cudgel—sometimes with one in each hand. Queer Person was bound to inherit some of these expressions of ill feeling like ricocheting arrows.

A sudden check came to the rough deeds when Big Pipe arranged a public whipping for three young rascals who had thrown a live porcupine into Granny's lodge among her dogs; so for a time almost real safety tended her steps. Then when green-grass time came, the village being concerned with the great task of migrating, there was little opportunity in which to study mischief.

This moving proved a trial to our strange little family, too, for they possessed no horses, and merely existed on the charity and crumbs of others. The four dogs were each harnessed to a small travois in order to haul the smaller articles. The travois was built of two poles crossed over the dog's back, fastened to him by a harness. Between the dragging ends of the poles at the

rear was fastened a basket effect of woven willows and strips of skin. Often the basket would catch on brush and rocks and the old woman must needs be there to lift the load over the obstacle. Granny herself carried the heavy tepee cover on her back by means of a tumpline across the brow. The tumpline consisted of a broad strap across the forehead and around the load suspended on the back, thereby relieving the shoulders. When the child became peevish with fatigue or sore feet—since he was wearing cast-off moccasins much too large—the old soul carried him high on her pack for a while.

One day the Shoshone scouts hampered and worried the long column most seriously as it wound its way serpentinely over the plains and hills. The guards, front and rear, as well as laterals, had managed to prevent an attack. When night came, however, the whole village was exhausted with the rather strenuous pace maintained during the day, and especially tired were the old, sick, and young. Granny was slow in removing the harness and loads from the dogs who waited so patiently; she was slow in building her fire; she was too tired to set up her tepee.

So the cover was spread out on the ground, and the dogs, together with the boy, followed her, merely crawling under the great leathern mass, and were soon fast asleep. She was unable to carry tepee poles with her, because this necessitated horses. Being old and feeble, she could not even cut a few crooked willows each night. Because of the old-time custom whereby men did not assist in women's work, except under rare circumstances, she dared not ask others for help.

One night late in the summer she arrived in camp just in time to see that promising young brave, Middle Rider, brother-in-law to Big Pipe, carried to the chief's tepee in great pain. Directly someone came for her to assist, it being well known that she was versed in mystic cures with seeds, herbs, and strange clays. The patient could not walk without pain, could not be placed on a horse at all, and was easy only when flat on the ground with his left knee bent up. The wound was in the hip, and the arrow had been pulled out, the head remaining. This was revealed by conversation among the young man's friends. Granny soon discovered by flexing the leg with her hand placed flat on the hip exactly

where the trouble lay. A distinct grating was simultaneous with the flexing: here was the pain. So deep was the arrow head that probing proved of no avail. That old people often take unusual liberties with high authority is accepted as matter of fact. This was a real case of necessity, and, no one else expressing any ideas as to procedure, Granny turned to Big Pipe, saying:

"To save him from deep poison this camp must not be moved for several suns. If you place robes in my lodge and carry him there I can catch that flint." No sooner said than the chief's wife, Goes-before, appeared with robes, and warriors carried the patient over. It is needless to try to tell what Granny did with that wound, for nobody knows but herself; these things were her precious secrets. Suffice it to say that on the third morning her poultices had so drawn on the angry flesh that the arrowhead was dislodged and she worked it out, soon laying a beautifully barbed, very small, black obsidian head in the palm of the victim. Middle Rider's puzzled expression brought this from his benefactress: "Shoshones; they are the only ones who dare to enter the place of Devil's Mud where this sharp rock lives."

It will be understood that she referred to what is now known as Yellowstone Park, where there are mountains of this black, glassy rock.

From that day on the Granny referred to Middle Rider as her son.

Came a night when she straggled in after dark to discover something unusual. The other lodges were all established. There in the place always set aside for her, three doors from the chieftain's handsomely painted lodge, was a set of poles. In the center a hearth of stones from the river bed had been laid, while near it was a neat pile of fire sticks all broken to convenient length. No one was in sight, at least no one who would have done this kindness in the open. Well did Granny know that ridicule would prevent any man from doing this deed in the daylight. Time was when she would have resented it most heartily, for it might have implied that she was not very efficient, and, besides that, far be it from her to request help when she knew it was all the men could do to keep fit for the drastic labor of war, perpetual horse breaking and the eternal necessity of procuring meat. Once there had been men aplenty in her household: the tall husband

warrior and the five equally tall sons, all of whom had been lost in wars with the Shoshones and Crows, and that within two short seasons.

This was all long ago, however, and all her back thought was getting her nowhere on this particular evening; besides, here was a whimpering little deaf and dumb child pulling on her skirt and begging for food and rest. She set about making her camp.

So the summer wore on: the village had trailed its snaky length over thousands of little brown hills, had carved its silhouetted shape through countless colored horizons. Berry season had come and gone; followed the time of hawthorne apples; timbered hills high above the great plains had yielded a quantity of fresh white lodgepoles, and the Pikunis were at last in search of game for the winter's supply of pemmican.

Pemmican is a marvelous food! It is first cousin to the white man's mincemeat. The meat is sliced into thin sheets, dried and smoked on racks about slow fires. Then it is pounded up into a consistency not unlike semimoist sawdust. Next, it is mixed with dried berries and some wild spices—common juniper berries and the leaves

of a foothill shrub, now known to us as New Jersey Tea. Lastly it is packed into cases of parfleche, or partly tanned hide. Melted fat is poured over the food before the containers are closed. This food will keep a year.

Game was found, to be sure, but only in small scattered herds, and very little surplus meat had been secured over the daily needs. Hence winter had become somewhat advanced ere they settled upon a suitable place for the long camp, and less than a fool could have told that this was to be a hungry season, unless by some rare favor late winter herds proved more accessible. Without the usual supply of dried meat and pemmican, what was to carry them through those seasons of long storms and deep snows? The scant reserve stores of dried camas bulbs, leeks, and other root forms, together with berries, came to be marked by serious inroads. Storms were more frequent and the snow remained longer, so that at last Granny banked the lodge with brush and sod.

She looked at her dogs who had served her so well and of whom the child was so fond. Of course, even if worst came to worst, they would not starve for a time.

Deep in the middle of winter, when shadows were very long, the men began preparing for that ceremony which was a last resort before beginning on the horse herds for meat. Woolly headgears of buffalo skin, bearing the smaller horns of cows, were unearthed from the sacred bundles in the secret fraternities. Plains Indian tribes were eaten alive with these secret societies. A host of buffalo-hoof rattles were used. Some had the toes strung on strips of hide; others, hoofs fastened on turtle shells. This was to be a Buffalo Dance in all particulars, not unlike the Elk Mystery performed by their enemies toward the east, the Ogalalla Sioux. Habits and mannerisms of the buffalo were reproduced until the bellowing and dust were almost realistic enough to cause the more timid spectators to flee. The ceremony continued from time to time over a period of one moon, after which, if game was not located in large enough numbers to warrant remaining on the present site for winter camp, another long move was to be made. The mere thought was a matter of great dread to Granny, but the calamity came in spite of her most ardent prayers.

Once more she found herself trailing away aft with the whimpering boy at her side and the loyal dogs following. It was near night, and she knew the others were already eating about their cozy fires somewhere up the river. That fragrant odor of wood smoke was drifting down wind to her eager nostrils. But, try as she would, her ebbing strength did not revive. She sat down on the wide, wide plain in the dusk, wondering if her time had come at last! Two or three big soft flakes of snow melted on her face as she studied the fast disappearing timber line along the river away ahead.

What was that she could see detaching itself from the timber? A rider? Yes. Someone was coming back on the trail, for now the steady rise and fall of a loping horse could be distinguished. She hoped it was a friend. Only a few moments passed ere she recognized the mouse-colored mount of "her son," Middle Rider, and then before she knew what was transpiring he was assisting her to the animal's back, had hoisted the lad up behind, and was now placing the pack on the withers of the horse. No conversation passed between them; Indians did not acquire

this superfluous-talk habit until they had been in contact with whites for many generations, and many do not have it even now.

When they reached the outskirts of the village there was a set of poles, a wee hearth, and a generous pile of firewood in the spot reserved for her lodge, exactly as she had found it once before. In a twinkling the young man had the cover spread and pinned over the poles, then staked down as best could be done, considering the ragged condition of the material. The dogs were unharnessed by quiet, firm, young hands. There was a home! Now Granny knew for certain who the friend had been on similar occasions.

Snow was falling quite rapidly by now, and once the blaze was well started on the rocks in the little lodge the young warrior thrust his head in the entrance to say that he, together with his two blood brothers, had located a huge herd of buffalo huddled down in a basin just beyond the next bend in the river, and that if the wind stayed in the present direction to-morrow promised a hunt near enough for the women to walk to the first killings. With that, the man reached over his shoulder to his quiver and drew forth

an arrow marked in a peculiar fashion. "If my medicine is good you are to butcher the first beast you find lying with arrows like this in its side." Then the darkness claimed him. This cheering word caused the lagging strength of the old soul to mount! She managed to feed her fire several times during the night, and when the sound of horses' hoofs crunching the snow outside grew voluminous she knew the hunters were gathering so as to drive down on the herd before the buffalo could get up from their sleeping places. A beast killed in the morning before he has been heated by a run in always more tender, and no one knows this better than an old Indian woman.

Somehow discipline was so impressed on the starving camp that one scarcely realized there were several hundred people there in the timber.

There was no dawn that morning; the atmosphere was merely pallid with haze and dense with mystery. Granny was glad it was not cold. Meantime, the snow had ceased to fall some time previously, but a heavy sky indicated that the storm was not over. She had one steel knife, her most treasured possession, and it had been

ground down through the years to a very narrow blade, indeed. She tested this with her thumb; then, selecting the finest grained rock from her hearth, worked the cutting edge into keener sharpness. So, gathering her remnant of robe about her scrawny shoulders, she stepped outside where she could already see other women preparing to hurry forward to the killing field. Together they awaited word from the hunters. Granny had her four dogs harnessed to the empty travois, and had carried the little boy over to the chieftain's lodge. At last a young woman with flying hair and rapidly wielded quirt dashed back over the hill to the waiting group. "Their medicine is good! They kill many! Hurry to the butchering grounds!" she cried.

No longer need for quiet! The happy cries that went skyward proved the signal for the rush. Granny had to hold tightly to the leashes of her dogs to keep from being dragged, and her old staff flew faster in the snow than was its wont. Now she was left far behind, for the horse travoix had all gone ahead at a mad rate. Only a few people remained in the trail with her, and these were lame and old like herself. But everybody

would go to this most welcome business! Women were looking with strained eyes into the mist ahead where dark forms could be distinguished lying in the snow. Scurrying figures, barking dogs, masses of travoix horses caused the spot to resemble some sort of market place, while chatter, cries of disappointment and snatches of song filled the air. Away ahead could be distinguished the cries of the hunters and the bellowing of the wild cattle as they raced away.

A sudden chorus of warnings caused a path to be opened through the busy women, for here came a wounded animal, a cow, on the back trail, with a hunter hard after. The thing dropped on its knees right in front of old Granny and her frightened dogs, then slowly settled over on its side so that the feathers of three arrows were conspicuous from just back of the last rib. Three women rushed to examine the arrows, but Granny, having recognized the hunter and his dun-colored horse, drove off the others with frantic croaks, for those were the very arrow marks that had been shown her last night. Oh, happy day! meat again, food; rest and safety! Meat! Meat! Meat! She had dressed enough

meat in her day for the whole camp, yet here she was at it again. Here was a fine robe, too, and think of that delicious tongue after all these many, many days of scant diet!—oh! so many that she could not count! Before starting to work she sat down on the beast to catch her breath. She laughed aloud, a hoarse unlovely laugh. People were still streaming by, farther up into the killing field. What luck and so close to camp!

Again she felt snow on her face; this might mean that the work would become hard. Time for worry was short; so she slit the skin of the animal on the inside of the legs and down the belly, and the job was started. It was a long task, and she was weak. Once the skin was off the pile of meat grew. The dogs were not forgot, either! Her face became smeared from constantly brushing back her hair; her back began to feel wet from the snow that melted there, but what were these matters when one had meat again!

Rolling and tying the hide about her meat for temporary safekeeping, she carried some pieces to a near-by fire that somebody had kindled for the purpose and, along with her companions,

roasted some on the end of her staff. Hunting up her ragged wrap, she tied it about her again, for now she felt chilly. Meantime, she fingered thoughtfully the three arrows whose points had pierced the liver of the animal to its death. Indeed, she had saved that very liver along with the tongue. Near by was another gaunt old woman who was eating a piece of raw liver, while her daughters cut and flayed away at the huge carcass of a bull. Loaded horses were being led back to camp by younger boys and girls, and at last Granny loaded her own travois and followed along the now well-packed trail.

Again rolling the meat in the fresh hide, and closing her lodge as securely as possible, she led the little boy back to the scene of meat getting. Here she at last discovered Goes-before hard at work on a carcass quite apart from the others. The younger woman pointed out another beast down in the edge of the willows that she knew to contain the arrows of her husband, the chieftain. Hither Granny trudged to begin the skinning. Time was when she could dress six buffalo in a day and still laugh at night.

Snow was falling so rapidly now that she could

no longer see the busy figure of her young friend, and the wind which had been steadily rising, changed, making it difficult to keep her poor old hands warm. She was glad she had left the dogs at camp, for they would have been hard to handle now. At last she could no longer keep on with the labor, and for some reason her friend did not come over to assist. She sat down close to the huge body, pulling the boy to her. There they huddled between the buffalo's legs, which happened to be on the leeward. Finally they became so chilled that alarm seized her lest she be too weak to fight her way back to camp. She called, but her frail old voice was as nothing in the now howling blizzard. There was but one thing to do. The huge hulk having been emptied of its viscera just as the wind was rising, and there being plenty of space inside, she crawled in and pulled the lad in after, then reached out and drew the skin down over the opening.

The blizzard howled on, and soon drifted the snow over the buffalo body.

CHAPTER IV

"How Do You Expect Me to Get Home Through All That Snow?"

THAT raggedest of lodges was blown half full of snow next morning.

"Did she help in the butchering?" asked Big Pipe of Middle Rider as the two started toward Granny's home.

"Yes, and here is proof, for these are my arrows from my first kill," replied the younger man. "See, she brought back the meat and tied it securely in the hide here and laid the three arrows on top." By now, Goes-before had wallowed her way through the drifts to where her men were gathering evidence. She lent her own bit. To her husband she said: "After Granny returned from carrying her load to camp she brought the boy back to where I was and wanted to help. I directed her to that bull down by the willows."

"The men looked for that carcass last night,

but could not locate it; they thought it must have been cut up and carried in," said the chief. "We thought she had come on in with the rest."

Snow had ceased to fall about daylight, but the wind was still drifting it in little wild whirls that went scurrying in zigzags through willows and between cottonwood trees out into the awful mystery of the vast prairie. "Bring her dogs and get some riders," said Big Pipe to Middle Rider, "for we must hurry. She may be turned to ice even now. And of course the boy will be gone." Goes-before was speechless. Granny had been a great comfort. Death at the hands of winter was not uncommon to these people, but it was always different. Realizing her helplessness, Goes-before gathered her robe about her shaking limbs, bent her face into the wind, and went home to tend the fire.

Some six or eight riders together with Middle Rider started in search of the old woman. Now they were passing through the timber between the camp and the hills that shut off the killing grounds of yesterday. In passing over these little hills Middle Rider dismounted and encouraged the dogs to sniff along in the buried trails. Here

and there a black horn fringed with woolly hair protruded from the snow; sometimes well-scraped ribs reared their ghastliness to view. Two big bundles of meat tied in the hides were located, these having been abandoned as the storm had increased its fierceness.

At last the dogs stopped where it was apparent a very thorough job of meat getting had been performed. Upon clearing away the snow the men revealed the stripped skeleton and head of a cow buffalo. It was evident from the intensive sniffing and digging done by the dogs, together with their occasional serious scanning of the surrounding country, that this was the animal driven back into the crowd by Middle Rider and later dressed by the very one whom they sought. Recalling the directions as to the last butchering done by his wife, Big Pipe could visualize the hunt itself. He led the party at a long angle from here toward the willows on the bank of the river.

The dogs were ahead, and Middle Rider was again in the saddle. Suddenly the dogs stopped. The snow bore up the weights of all four, and they peered sniffingly into the nearest willows.

Then it was that the young warrior could distinguish a rounded shape protruding high in what appeared to be a drift. A little fur stuck out of the snow. Toward this the dogs were making their way, sometimes covering the length of a lariat on the crust, sometimes hind legs dropping down deep. Sometimes they sank out of sight. They commenced to bark and tried to run. When finally they reached the buried form of a huge bull, their excitement ran beyond bounds, and they began to dig furiously under the great body, casting the snow out between their hind legs in a cloud. Someone stumbled over the pile of frozen entrails. What is this? Old Granny's butchering knife! Dismounting, Middle Rider and his blood brothers pryed up the board-like margin of the hide and, kneeling, looked into the cavern. To their amazement and great joy, a raucous voice ordered:

"Get out of here, you dogs! Can't you see an old woman is trying to escape this dark hole? What do you mean by pulling my clothes this way!" All the while the men could see the bony old hands patting and fondling the four heads in the most affectionate manner. Out crawled a very

much besmeared, blinking little boy, followed by the old woman herself. So here they were, a little the worse for generous quantities of tallow and beefy steam, but damaged not one bit. Looking about at the semiserious faces of her friends, Granny detected the slightest hint of a smile creeping over the countenance of her "son," Middle Rider. She looked back at the opening in the carcass through which she had so recently emerged and broke into a hoarse laugh, which proved so contagious that they all joined her. Stooping, she hauled forth her remnant of a robe and shook it.

"How do you expect me to get home through all that snow, and where is my staff? Did you find my butchering knife? What! are you still laughing at the wisdom of an old woman?" She had a funny way of asking one question on the heels of another, giving no time for replies, expecting none.

The Buffalo Dance had worked its medicine. During the balance of that winter game was plentiful in this neighborhood. It was not necessary to move camp again. Wood was never scarce, and a wide shallow ford of the river close

at hand was open most of the winter. All this good fortune was directly due to the powerful mystery of the ceremonial that the young men had so graphically executed. It had never failed, but the good gods forbade their using it often.

Later, that same day, her camp having been well banked, wood brought for her, and a piece of fresh buffalo hide hung on a hoop over her doorway, Granny sat cross legged near her fire, the sleeping child across her lap. It was more cosy in this home than it has been for a long time. She dipped leisurely into the meat pot on the hearth, watching the four faithful dogs snap eagerly at the bits thrown to them. Finally her eye fell on the closed fist of the little boy. The same hand had been closed the better part of the day. Was the little arm injured? She pried the small palm open. Its contents deserved study. There lay the wings of a dried black and red grasshopper, a species so common on the great Western prairies. Now she recalled having seen the boy stoop to pick up something as her cudgel scraped leaves, grass, and snow up about the base of her lodge earlier in the day. She

gathered him close and rocked to and fro ever so gently.

"Humph! an idiot! They call you an idiot! But you see patterns; you know pretty colors!" So she kissed him.

CHAPTER V

"What Can One Buy with a Beaver Hide, a Horse?"

WINTERS blew and finally melted away. Summers warmed and bloomed and dried up into things of the past. But autumns—they are always remembered by the brown people of the prairie. To them these were the seasons of real life. They brought times of plenty, great festivities, gatherings with other bands of Pikuni and Blackfeet who were numbered in the Confederacy. There were no springs; this season does not exist in the Great West. Old Cold Maker is too selfish to allow it. Our little family followed the fortunes, good and evil, of the village as it migrated in its own little way with the demands that such a life exacted; and, as would be expected with such limited physical endowments, things were seldom rosy along the way. In fact, they knew so little of relaxation that a certain weari-

ness attended them all the time. Their joys seldom mounted higher than what might be supplied by the mere possession of bare necessities. Dancing and playing were temporary with all the people of the village and directly dependent on food, shelter, safety.

That boon of unconscious drama, the sign language of the Plains Indians, was the only medium of conversation in the little household. Granny found a most apt pupil in her companion, to whose ears there was no world at all. Dead ears did not mean a deficiency in energy, for his eyes proved doubly alert. The firmament existed through his hands and eyes. And such hands! Supple, long, unconsciously graceful. When Queer Person acquired—not without pain—the power to express himself to some small degree, his old protector noticed very early that smiles and a desire to talk by some means or other were a natural counterpart of his make-up. He recovered from fatigue readily, for youth possesses springs not to be denied nor questioned. The old woman was content to sit for hours and be amused by his antics. He even caused sign language to outdo sign language by performing the

standard symbols with a little style all his own. Not only this, but he invented freely, often linking one symbol with an exotic twist of another so decidedly individual that Granny and her few close friends were wont to break into rollicking laughter. At such moments a most merry and engaging twinkle lurked in the eyes of the deaf boy. This byplay was the funnier because in the presence of strangers the lad instantly fell into his old habits of taciturn, postlike blankness, that very reserve which had lent him the atmosphere of idiocy. Alas! He even played with this cloak of idiocy and sometimes assumed it when Granny wished him to do little tasks about the camp.

When the boy was about eight summers along in the great adventure of life, he commenced to realize the need of self-protection. He was man enough to be aware that liberty from skirt protection was the only way to grow. Grow he must; play and romp he must; widen the range of his activities he must. But there were those larger and braver fellows all the time who jeered at him, who threw things at him, even rocks, and who occasionally set dogs on him when his back

was turned. He carried marks on his legs and back to his dying day. The chief's daughter, Singing Moon, his own age, a somewhat daring girl herself, played with him in a thousand childish games, and in her presence matters always went better.

At heart he was as brave as most boys, and while he realized he was different from the rest he did not know exactly what it was all about. He had learned beyond a doubt that to run away while Singing Moon or Granny warded off his enemies was not the thing to be done.

One day a harsh experience brought the problem into light perfectly. It was a late summer afternoon, and Granny was coming home on her staff, by jerks and halts, for the rheumatism was bad. Her attention was aroused by a mixed commotion in which the barking of dogs predominated. Turning about to learn the cause, she was suddenly struck to a cold speechless statue by the sight of her lean, lanky son running like a frightened fawn at top speed through the village, dodging through food racks and tepees alike. He was pursued by several dogs who were being egged on by a large group of yelling children of

mixed ages. To run and catch up with the group was out of the question for her. For the moment she forgot he was deaf and called his name loudly.

"Queeer Person! Queer Person! My son! Come this way!" But of course he paid no attention, and he was already too far to have noticed her. The terrified old woman caught glimpses of blood flecks on the flying legs where the dogs had nipped him. Then, just as he was about to disappear down the village toward home, one of the largest of the dogs leaped into the air with a great cry and fell struggling to earth with an arrow shaft clear through his body. The balance of the pack, together with the children, hesitated. They looked all about, only to see the figure of Middle Rider standing in the edge of the timber with a second arrow nocked and an expression on his face not very different from that of a grizzly bear with a sore head.

The youthful mob, with their canine terrors, melted like a morning mist before the sun! Our breathless boy stopped, with a recently and hastily picked-up rock in each hand. He gave one glance to the now dead dog. Then his eye fell on

Middle Rider. Until then his emotions had been abject fear slightly colored with the fiercest of anger, but now that was all over, and he saw the little slashes in his calves, his chin quivered and his glance dropped to the sod, his arms relaxed and those knees that had been flying with phenomenal speed so shortly before commenced to shake. The warrior was at his side in an instant; a warm, naked arm of copper power was laid gently across the bony, boyish shoulders. The man did not speak. It was too much for the proud little heart; he leaned against the hip of his friend and wept bitterly, mostly from anger.

By now, Middle Rider was aware of an approaching volume of grumbling and almost unintelligible profanity from the rear; and, his own anger having subsided, he found himself hard put to smother a very stubborn smile.

"It's all right now, Little Mother," said Middle Rider, softly, for even intimates would forget the boy was deaf, he seemed to understand so much. "You and I must make some plans."

Once Queer Person had gained the raggedest of tepees, the wounds, not serious, thanks to timely intervention, were washed. The lad became an

ardent spectator of the succeeding council. Lip reading was becoming one of his accomplishments. Granny was saying: "They still call him 'bad spirit,' 'evil thing,' 'bringer of storms,' and 'dark water,' their sight is so short and their wisdom so shallow." This was punctuated with a wild brandish of her cudgel that nearly caused Middle Rider to dodge.

"Enough of talk, Little Mother. There will be those among us with short noses and many fears, always. The chief and I know it is no addled soul in this little body. He proves at every turn that a big fire burns within him. Given a chance he may live through it all, but he will need much help. I am told, somehow or other, that to rear this child may mean something to our people. Maybe I am wrong, but the feeling is strong and my medicine is good. I believe in him." This caused Granny's face to light.

"Have you dreamed that, too?" she asked in awed tones. "I keep trying to see what the medicine is going to be. It comes one way at times, and in different ways other times. Seldom do I find myself free from the thought. Who and what do you suppose this child of mine is?"

Disregarding her queries, the man went on:

"I will begin this day to teach him to shoot. He and I will make his bow at once. He may have this quiver and my arrows. They are much too long for him, but he will grow up to them. Besides, everyone knows those arrows of mine and that quiver made of the long-tailed cat. Knowing these, it will be a daring hand indeed that will be lifted against him," proudly boasted the warrior. "When he learns to shoot let him do more for you. He will help keep the dogs fed by the game he kills and sometimes bring in things for you. I shall warn my blood brothers to keep watch over him when they can, and we shall begin to teach him the way of horses." Thus it was that Queer Person's schooling began. It will be understood that the long-tailed cat is the mountain lion. The skin of this animal has especially strong powers as protective medicine.

To find himself suddenly raised from the status of a lonely, quite despised, queer little boy to the pupil of the famous trio of the Three Riders caused the mute to swell inordinately with childish pride. His former tormentors watched him ride by with the Three Riders, and while some

of them were being taught by famed warriors, too, no popularity compared with that of the Three. Queer Person went to the hills with his idols and saw them bring down elk and deer, and he was taught to help in the dressing.

The chief had commenced to study the boy a little more carefully. Big Pipe learned from his young brother-in-law that the child possessed the "spirit eye," a rare and much feared as well as cherished supernatural power. He stopped Queer Person in his youthful to-ing and fro-ing one day—an Indian translation for childish wandering. They also say why-ing and what-ing. The old man settled on his haunches, as prairie people do, and signed that he wished to see the little lad's knife. The actual reason was to get an opportunity for looking into those eyes that were said to be so knowing. If he really had the spirit eye, his case must be investigated, for it has been known that this power could be either of good or extremely evil purpose. While ostensibly examining the poor, little imitation knife which the child had fashioned from a piece of slate Big Pipe watched the child's eyes. They were of soft depth, long, and narrow, rather deeply set for one of his

years, and the whites scarcely showed at all. The lashes were so long and thick as to lend an almost furred appearance.

The child knew that Big Pipe was *the chief*, but such was the old man's love for little folks that almost no children showed him the deference due his office. Hence it was not surprising that Queer Person grinned back at the chief, exhibiting a wondrous row of white teeth, while his inky orbs creased themselves almost out of sight. So engaging was this friendly smile that Big Pipe could not refrain from touching the lad's brow with two fingers, making the sign for him to close his eyes. Then the chief untied from his very own belt a quilled scabbard of noble length containing a finely chipped red churt—kind of flint—knife with elk-horn handle, fastened this to the funny little deerskin belt of the boy—on which some of the hair still lingered—which sustained the child's loin cloth. As a last bit in this little scene, the boy's hands were caused to fold about the gift. Slowly those knowing hands explored the scabbard and knife, while the eyes yet remained curtained. Then suddenly he clapped one small palm over his mouth, the

sign for extreme amazement, and opened his eyes with a rather wild stare. They softened, did those eyes, almost to a mist. The white row of teeth spoke silently again. No time to lose! Away flew the rather over-tall boy to show Granny!

Standing erect, still watching the boy, the chief said to himself, "They are good. They see with a good light. And they have the 'spirit charm medicine.' This must not be talked of, for he is so young. We must warn Granny to keep him more and more to herself except for the Three Riders."

Not long after receiving his wonderful knife the hitherto outcast was being instructed in many items of wild lore, when the party of four dismounted on a sand bar of the river, of which there were many exposed this season, for it had been exceptionally dry. The three teachers examined carefully the moccasin tracks of somebody who had been leading his horse along the river bank.

"Mountain Crow," said Middle Rider to Queer Person, as the other two men instinctively looked out over the horizon. Time came when

that name spelled the most crowning grief of Queer Person's existence.

There were long periods, however, when the pupil saw almost nothing of the teachers: periods of raiding, war excursions, horse hunting. Lastly they were absent on just those trips upon which young warriors are bound to go, merely for exploration purposes, if nothing more kept them away. Many times big matters of tribal interest arose, during which the old woman and her waif were utterly forgotten for half a summer at a time.

It was in the midst of one of these times when a poor widow woman came running in wildest of anguish to Granny for help. Her boy, a year younger than Queer Person, had stumbled into a big fire that had been used for heating rocks near the sweat lodges, and his whole left side was seriously burned from some rocks yet in the coals. Some of Granny's clay with its admixture of unmentionables was brought into play, and again the raggedest of lodges was converted into a hospital.

Once the child began to recover, our mute abandoned some of his reserve and made over-

tures. The two were at least nine and ten summers of age now. The first good turn was when Queer Person brought in a young cottontail to be prepared for the patient. Later he brought in the wings of many kinds of grasshoppers, for grasshoppers were always one of his passions, and investigation would have proven that this was just a phase of his color adoration. There was not much talk about these things between the two boys, for the younger one could not have kept up with Queer Person even though he had been able to use his left hand. Besides, Queer Person seemed especially shy, and even more so in the presence of anyone who had an ailment.

It so happened that the village was not moved during the little boy's worst days of suffering, and for this his mother and Granny were most grateful. The lad could not have been moved and expected to survive. But when the first move was really made the chief's wife lent them a horse with a travois.

Now it had been Granny's custom to remain behind the camp on certain occasions in order to prowl about the deserted site and gather here and there certain discarded bits of materials and

food—in other words, for scavenger purposes—such things as pieces of string, rope, old half-worn-out moccasins, marrow from big roasted bones, and even discarded joints from which all the meat had not been removed. But she could not well allow the patient to go ahead without her, and to leave the deaf boy to perform such duties seemed out of the question to her.

This did not seem out of the question to the deaf boy, not one whit! He was quick to recognize the chance for an adventure that had figured in his prayers this long time—namely, to stay out all alone some night. To be sure, he had always slept on the ground and mostly under the stars, in fact, altogether too much so when one considers the ragged condition of Granny's lodge. But this was different! It would be a test of his courage, and as much as he longed to do it there really was something fearfully scary about it.

He did not suspect how much his deafness shut him out of things. Perhaps it was this very lack that caused him to crave wider range for his play and thought than most boys of his age. Granny was always telling what awful things

befell disobedient ones, and Queer Person himself knew of certain ones who had gone out only to disappear forever from their friends. Yet in spite of all he craved the privilege of being out alone.

He being larger, longer, leaner, and swifter, as the days passed, the cross-country treks became easier for him. He came to love the great overland trails. Being deprived in some senses also, he studied, pondered and ruminated a deal more than most of the boys of equal years. In fact, with the added ability in lip reading, together with the abundance of homely old philosophy of his aged protector, he had come to love sitting with his elders just to absorb. Old-time Indians supplemented conversation with hands a great deal, there being certain ideas that stubbornly refused expression without the hand symbols. The boy often sat with these groups. They had long since become accustomed to Granny's "idiot." Padded with this background of thought, the great adventure of a night out alone and a long trip in and out of the trail toward camp the next day was worth trying at any price.

The permission having been secured, Granny

cautioned the boy to be back by sunset the next evening; that is, he must catch up with the caravan by that time. Also he was to avoid open prairie and mesas, but rather skirt the rim rocks, river timber, and deep cuts. In this way he could observe the herds of game for signs of lurking enemies, and could meantime run less risk of meeting these solitary old bulls that have been driven from the herds. These are a most dreaded type of beast for a foot traveler.

So the village moved, and the boy felt just a wee pang of regret that he had undertaken so much. The last of the great caravan had trailed itself into an infinitude of space. His solitude was simply awful! But he was spared the anguish to which normal folk are subject—silence. Queer Person crept out of the deserted village, casting furtive glances hither and yon among the now dead fireplaces and circles of rock that had been used in lieu of tent pegs. To sleep in the empty village meant brooking the ill favor of ghosts that always follow the tribal trail; so he crept outside to find a place to sleep.

Next morning he arose from his bed of leaves and grass in the choke-cherry brush, laughed at

his former fears, and set about with a will to gather the usual discarded bits. Once through with this task, he started out bravely, not walking in the great trail, but dodging about in broken land and cover. Dry grass and rocks tell few tales; dust and sand are bad. At last the sun was so high that he could place his foot on the shadow of his head. He had been told that if at this hour on a sunshiny day his shadow were missing he might have become a spirit all unawares to himself. His shadow was comforting, like another self, and he talked to it in signs. And it answered most amazingly, always agreeing.

In a small tributary of the big river, away across the valley, his ever-roving eye detected some little glistening patches of water. Timber cut the little stream at such regular intervals that the water looked like a string of some kind of giant beads. Would it be hard to get over there? It would be such fun anyhow, and after that he would run so as to be in on time. Scarcely had he completed the thought than he was threading his way through the rocks to a ford in the river.

Those little lakes told but one story, of course.

Beaver! Lake number one possessed a grass-grown dam with not one single bit of life. Number two had been inhabited more recently, for here were found a few cuttings and one dry slide. But the third one was the very personification of life itself! In the first place the dam was so recent in construction that not one spear of grass grew upon it, and the whole top of the wall was fresh, wet mud. The margin of the lake was fringed with white stumps of various sizes with wide trails running between them.

But the house in the middle was what drew the eye of the young hunter! This mass stood out of the water as high as he was tall, let alone what was under water, and he knew exactly what it was, for Middle Rider had explained this on several occasions. Sticks and limbs of all sizes composed the bulk of it, while the interstices, like the dam, were packed with grass, reeds, cat-tails, leaves, and mud. One side was literally paved with wet, slick mud alone. How well he remembered the time his three teachers pointed out a beaver house on one of their winter rides. They told him that the steam rising from the thatched top was due to the life within, but that

the crazy mass was frozen so deeply on the sides that one could never get at the animals. Besides, they would swim away under the ice and escape into holes in the bank at the least trouble that sounded serious. But this was not winter at all, now! On the other hand it was glorious fall, and the whole world belonged to a mere boy!

What to do? Get rid of the water about the house, of course! So he whipped off his moccasins and leggings, laid them in the grass near by, chose the narrowest place in the dam and set to work pulling out sticks. A small trickle of water commenced eating a way down through the latticework of willows, but as the lad pulled out more supports this stream grew, until finally it came with a rush and he was obliged to step back. A beaver had fled from the house! There was a roily trail left in the water clear to the bank. Perhaps his hunting was not to be good that day.

Now that the water was down low, if anything else sought to escape from that house, matters would assume a different face. He selected a stout club about the length of himself and stood leaning on this, waiting. At last only a wee dribble was finding its way down across the black mud,

while here and there over the glistening surface lay some flipping trout forms, gasping their last. In a perfectly human way he delayed the final moment of his thrill to have a look at the fish, thinking to himself:

"You're pretty. I have seen porcupine embroidery not so very different from your colors. Perhaps they came from you." Some deaf people transpose sensation to such an extent as to get tone complement out of colors. Touch the fish he wouldn't, for this was in the day when Blackfeet would use very few birds for food and touched fish—never!

There remained no excuses for not discovering his fate at the beaver house now; so he proceeded through the mud, peered into the hole at its base, and mounted the thing, not without a certain weak-kneed condition. First off, he belabored the sides of the house with his club. If vibrations alarmed beaver as much as they did deaf boys, he fancied they would die of fright, pure and simple! No result. So he thrust a slim, green wand of willow through the messwork of the ventilating system at the top and felt about. It was a long way down! At last something seemed to

shift and give rather suddenly. Out came the willow and he studied the end. Sure enough, there were the long outer hairs of a beaver coat. Then he alternated between churning the willows up and down and pounding the sides of the crazy structure with his club, until, all of a sudden, there, facing him in the mud some two paces from the house, was a large beaver, chattering his teeth viciously and blowing little formidable puffs at the enemy. In a twinkling he stood between the beaver and the hole into the house.

Now, a beaver makes a short demonstration of savagery, and really can be dangerous to handle. This is all bluff, for he realizes how slow he is on land. This one stood in oozy mud. When cornered, often they cover their faces with front paws, probably with the same instinct that a porcupine rolls up, or an opossum plays death, for there is not the slightest proof that they know what they are doing. To hit one on the body merely bruises him, for he possesses a thick layer of seal-like blubber under the hide, but one little crack on the skull will put him out. So this is what Queer Person proceeded to do.

Once his game was dead, the lad knew more than to drag it by a hind leg across that mud and work the beautiful fur full of the black slime; not he to do that! The thing was dragged by a front leg, and the heavy body slid over the mud most readily to the bank, where it was placed on its back. The red flint knife was caused to show its caliber. A beaver is hard to skin even with a steel knife, and it takes a long time, but in spite of all this, a very creditable job was done. Training had taught the young hunter that beaver meat is a great delicacy. To carry the whole animal, even though dressed, all that distance to camp was out of the question. So he unjointed the tenderloin with the hindquarters, rolled the meat in the hide, fur out, tied the whole into his improvised sack, and was ready to go. After he had redressed himself and gathered up his load a mild panic came over him, for the sun was much lower than he dreamed. Away he hurried across the valley to the trail of his people, which trail was now two days old.

At last the telltale wood smoke odor and certain unmistakable tracks revealed to the boy that camp was near. How to get in and not re-

ceive the full blast of old Granny's wrath over his tardiness was a problem.

Right then and there our boy decided to practise an art that had lain more or less dormant in him all his life. This very craftiness was to play a part in his existence that would prove more powerful than all physical weapons of all time. He was glad he had not washed the black mud from his arms and face, for they entered into his ruse of make-up. His hair was pulled down over one side of his face, and he assumed a heavy, laboring walk with the aid of his long staff—a thing he always carried when running wild in the hills. It was so useful for poking into things! The big bundle scarcely remained on his shoulder. In fact, as he entered the circle of light from Granny's camp and saw her standing, arms akimbo, a belligerent thrust in her toothless lower jaw, that selfsame bundle did slip clear from his shoulder. He made an unnaturally feeble attempt to raise the load again, then dragged it to the tepee entrance, dropped it, and flung himself down.

His face was lowered to his knees, about which latter he had wound his arms, but an active eye

was taking in the scene on the diagonal. He knew she was scolding violently, because the four dogs had retreated from the camp, and sat in a row watching developments. What she said was lost on the object of her wrath, but might prove interesting to us, for by now she was nearing the sack. Curiosity was aroused.

"It's a wonder your useless bones have not been picked by wolves and magpies this long time, you bad, bad boy! What do you think will come of it all? You, deaf as a rock! Who got you this far? And you won't even mind me!" By now she had painfully lowered herself to her knees and was untying the sack. On second thought she lifted it and found it very heavy. One passing shot was fired at the huddled figure of the boy.

"What! bringing home a load of rocks again. Always carrying home a mess of useless colored rocks!"

But the feel of this bundle denoted anything but rocks; so she hastened to untie the string. Then slowly she laid out the contents. A deep quiet took possession of her, more striking because of her previous excitement. She reached

over to touch the lad on the shoulder. Not a move from him. Then she pushed him ever so slightly and waited. This was too much, for he leaped up and started a dance, to her utter astonishment. The dogs half rose, but did not quite dare to come over yet awhile. Then at a signal they and the boy fell into such a mêlée of mock struggle that old Granny threw a piece of firewood at them. At last when things assumed a natural turn again Granny signed:

"What do you want to do with this fine fur?" And he answered her with another question.

"What can one buy with a beaver hide?—a horse?"

"Not much of a horse with one beaver." The old woman grimaced. Then she sat pondering a few moments. At length she arose and signed for the lad to follow. At the chief's lodge they learned that the great leader was away and that Goes-before herself had no horses she could spare, but that she would seek her brother, Middle Rider. When this personage arrived it was plain that he had heard the whole story, for his seriousness was tempered by a smile that would out. He caused the boy to repeat all that

had happened, and the little audience watched the flying hands with great interest. All laughed when the story ended.

"And I want to trade the hide for a horse." This last was punctuated by handing the glossy coat to the beloved teacher. Imagine; to buy without having seen the horse? But the man laid a hand on the lad's head with affection, then went out with the fur. It was not long before Granny signed that someone had brought a horse up and for all to come out. It was a larger horse than the average Indian pony, rather high in the shoulders, and slightly over in the knees, with more years than would be good for a war pony or a buffalo hunter.

This meant that the animal was in the class of what is known as "travois horses," a wise selection indeed on the part of Middle Rider, who, without a doubt, had old Granny in mind as much as the boy. Anyhow, it was a horse, and a horse spelled emancipation from certain species of labor to both the old woman and the boy. The relief they would derive from this beast was identical with that which the horse brought to their race! No longer would Granny toil over

hills, bent with the loaded tumpline on her brow, for the tepee cover would be lashed to the basket of a travois. No longer would she walk after the village when on the march; no longer would the four dogs be overloaded in their small packs; surplus food would not have to be discarded; wood could be dragged up by a rope; cold streams in the trail held no more terrors. When the horse was not needed for work the boy could ride with other lads, at least those who would befriend him.

So, taking the hackamore leash from Middle Rider's hand, the lad walked proudly away to Granny's home, the tall beast following. After being picketed near the lodge the horse was fed bundles of rich river grass, and later his legs were rubbed down, his mane combed out, and tail tied up as in the days when he had been a swift matter of real consequence. If horses think at all, certainly this one found himself in a quandary.

Days later, when the village was again on the trail and Queer Person was trudging ahead of the old horse with its loaded travois and aged rider, the four dogs almost romping with their

light burdens, Big Pipe, Middle Rider, and his two blood brothers were trotting past toward the head of the column, when the mute turned and signed that adage which bespeaks wealth among the Blackfeet peoples:

"The women of my family do not have to walk!" No small amount of laughter attended that advance of the four men as they sought the group of warriors away at the lead.

Not long after this Middle Rider took on Queer Person as a sort of warrior's servant, herdsboy in other words, for which services two other old horses were added to Granny's household. Times were looking up! She felt as though the old days were returning. The boy was becoming less childish every day; responsibility found its way in his direction, and more people proved friendly with the strange old woman. The word "idiot" was used less, and was replaced by "That-boy-with-no-voice."

On all occasions Queer Person made it his business to assist Granny's friend and the poor little fellow who had been burned. The deaf boy gave them one of his old horses; after that the two families pooled many of their interests in

life. The lodges were pitched side by side, the three horses picketed together, and the two women were of mutual help in a thousand little ways that only women understand. And as for the boys, they became inseparable. People dubbed the little burned boy the "Twisted One," for the great scar under his arm had drawn down his left shoulder in a most one-sided style. "Birds of a feather"; so these four people overcame a big share of their miseries and dared to pick some of the roses along the walks of their wild life.

CHAPTER VI

Turtle Medicine

Queer Person had grown to be a tall, slender youth, straight as a reed in a bog, while his companion resembled the gnarled elfin form of a scrub oak. The companion had a limp, slight and jaunty withal, but otherwise he proved tremendously active. What one missed, the other gathered in; so it may be depended upon that few things in their world went uninspected. One pair of ears had to do for both. The Twisted One rapidly improved in his hand talk, too, for Queer Person was constantly at him with something to say. One of the famous trio, Black-bush-three by name, had taken on the Twisted One as herdsboy at Queer Person's suggestion. The two were in the hills together constantly. As they lay in the grass on a wide slope one day their conversation drifted into something that was bound to interest every Indian boy of

adolescent years, and not a few were greatly frightened by the same subject.

"What happens when one does not seek his spirit medicine until too late?" asked the mute. His gaze was seemingly lazy as it drifted over the numberless horses grouped somewhat in bunches and grazing over the spacious valley. In truth, a seething fire was burning within. His lip reading had caught a none too charitable remark from a group the previous day. His companion—always more clumsy with the hand-talk—wishing to save his friend, was hard put when it came to answering honestly.

"You are older than I. Your time for the dream is here. Some say you never will go for your medicine. They believe your spirit is partly asleep in your head. They used to think you were bad medicine. I heard it." Queer Person watched his friend's hands with a slanted look, then smiled a bit too wisely for his years. The smile faded into pathos.

"I am like none other. When they say I do not hear they really mean I am an idiot. Perhaps—mebby so if I go for the dream I can find out."

"Are you afraid?" asked the Twisted One.

"No—yes I am, a little, but don't you tell."

"Crane's Talk was in the trail yesterday, and he told Granny all boys who can think straight in their heads should go. He thinks your head is all right like mine."

Well did Queer Person know what advice like this from Crane's Talk, the oldest medicine man in the village, would mean. A species of dread settled over him. The thing was always so remote that he felt wholly unprepared for the ordeal. He dismissed the whole business, however, for the herd was drifting, and the two mounted their ponies that had been feeding near by at the ends of leashes.

The day's work over, these two naturally healthy and hungry boys found their way to Granny's lodge amid the activity of a lazy summer evening. Opposite the fire sat the mother of Twisted One, and Granny was busy with her work.

The playmate watched Queer Person wistfully, for he had known all along. Stew was dished into wooden receptacles from the ever-ready pot on the fire, but instead of serving the mute with

food Granny scraped some charcoal from the fireside into his bowl, and it must be said that her hand trembled a bit as she extended this to her son. The boy, taken off guard, cast her an appealing look, recoiling the while. But he saw she meant it and, having been told from babyhood on that bravery is what makes men, he gathered his resources, took the plate, and accepted his fate.

A moment elapsed ere he could collect his thoughts, during which time he seemed to forget his surroundings; his gaze penetrated a thousand miles into the fire. Those about him remained motionless. At last, with a shrug, he blackened his face with the charcoal, reached for his robe, cast one hungry look at the meat pot, and vanished through the door into the night. The dogs flew out with him, only to return presently, for this was once when their playmate and master refused their company. Those in the lodge seemed dazed.

It had come: he had left! Would he return? Who could tell? For if his courage held out he would make a hard journey and stay until the great voices of those spirit powers who peopled

the religious world of the prairie Indian spoke to him. The more brave the young candidate to this ordeal of fasting, solitude, prayer, and exposure, the farther he would go and the longer he would stay. Dangers untold followed the medicine seekers, but what of the trail of a deaf one? In moments like this Granny sought her medicine tom-tom by way of solace. So depressed was the Twisted One that he scarcely touched his own food that night. How he wished that his people had broken the requirement of absolute solitude on these missions that he might accompany his pal! He went over to the dogs and wound his good arm about the smallest one. These were Queer Person's dogs, these were! His sobs were poorly disguised.

The slope up which Queer Person climbed was sparsely wooded and very rocky until one reached the high places on the ridge. It was painful climbing even in daylight. A dull heart made it worse, a pain in fact. At last he was in real timber where his people had been scraping new lodgepoles from the young trees. This species of Rocky Mountain pine is named "lodgepole" because our red people had used them so long.

He stopped. About him jagged pine silhouettes cut themselves against starry space, while down below, among those twinkling little lights—he did not know which twinkled the more, the real stars or those wee camp fires—was food, comfort, safety, his people. Most of his people had not thought kindly of him in his earlier childhood, and few were even cordial now; but so long as he had no contrasts for comparison it made no difference—they were his people.

He turned his back on it all. Half dragging his robe, his feet found the game trail that marks the top of every mountain ridge. He let it lead him whither it would! Sometimes the trail was steep, sometimes it rose so gently that he was scarcely aware of the increase in altitude. By and by it was so densely wooded that it allowed no light from above and he stopped to rest. The night air was chilly. He was most woefully alone. Most boys would have had the added fear of hearing things.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and he felt chagrined to think he had slept so long. Flies and heat soon caused him to start on. One thing was certain; his fears had diminished with

the arrival of daylight. Occasionally small patches of sunlight lay ahead of him in the trail which had now taken a turn downward. Brief glimpses of deer and elk ahead told him of the life that was looking on. Blue grouse merely stepped aside to give him passage and blinked curiously at this strange animal moving so silently through their high wooded home. At times it was almost more than he could endure to pass the huckleberries and thimble berries that covered the slopes. Even juniper berries, which he knew but did not relish, looked tempting. In fact, something had been eating on that very bush right there—a bear—he could tell now, for the thing had taken the long vinelike branches of this sprawling conifer in his mouth and had raked the whole length through his jaws, thus stripping off needles, berries, and all. For the moment the lad forgot his misery in his interest in this method of feeding. No bear was in sight. He went on.

Yes, the trail was fast dropping now and his homesickness increased, for he knew the divide placed a barrier between himself and Granny, the dogs, and all the people. Back there, they

were in an open country where one could see somewhere; perhaps they were cooking or preparing meat to dry, or stretching parfleche. He wondered what the Twisted One would do for company, and who would look after his dogs and the old horses.

Occasionally strange plants were seen along the way now, and he found that he had passed the altitude of lodgepole pines into the yellow pines. About this time a vista opened showing for an instant a wide valley below with grasslands, willow timber, a big river, and, not very far beyond, some bristling rocky cliffs. But the trail shut out all this at the next little turn. He was yet in heavy mountain timber. Naturally the boy doubled his precautions as he neared this great valley, for an enemy people might live there.

A slight movement in the leaves and needles ahead of him caught the sun. It was in the trail and too small to cause alarm; so he hurried to discover its meaning. It proved to be a turtle that had somehow got on its back and was making frantic efforts to right itself by use of its nose. Queer Person leaned over to watch it a

moment, then gently turned it over, saying with his hands meanwhile:

"Little Brother, friend of the Under-Water-People, make me strong and safe from those spirits of the river ahead, for I must cross it. And if an enemy people live down there let me see them first."

A turtle is funny company; better than none. The thing made Queer Person almost want to laugh, the thousand-year look in those small round eyes, the two pinhole nostrils, and lower jaw quite devoid of chin. Then he passed the turtle, but decided this might not be the correct medicine, so turned back and spoke to the "flat box" again.

"Why does the 'flat box' tell me to stay behind? Does he have something to say because I turned his house right side up?"

The reptile stopped a little moment, one foot stretched out behind, another way forward, then scrambled around the Indian's feet and on down the trail. The Indian followed, smiling a bit, for he was enjoying this little friend. The lowly guide led the way to the river's edge, turned to the left where the game trail forked,

and dove into the water unceremoniously at the root end of a large fir that had laid its entire length across the angry, roaring stream from bank to bank. The Indian motioned a simple "Good-bye" to the place where his friend disappeared.

You and I would have heard this river half an hour before reaching its edge, but the boy had been aware of its vibrations only a short time. Anyhow, the "flat box" had led him to a bridge, and this bridge was used by animals and men alike, judging from the tracks in the trail. Our boy waited some time before exposing himself on the log, then crossed without more to-do. He entered the willows where he might study the back trail, the banks of the stream, and the cliffs to the northwest, which latter shut out the world from the valley on that side. Not a sign of life did he see except fish in the little cove nearest him; so he left his cover, crossed a marshy area, and sought the cliffs beyond. He must find a safe place in which to complete his fast and have his dream. This was no casual period of starvation visited upon him by nature, like the little spells of famine when all the people suffered alike—

this was premeditated, real, purposeful, nay worse! Food was at hand! and he had to shun it!

Gaining the dry land beyond the swamp, the seeker of truth picked his way through the talus, stopping now and then to scan the surrounding country for possible enemies. At last he made for a big block of the cliff, five times his own height, that had become detached from the great wall itself. On the top of this citadel grew one scraggly, undersized yellow pine. He found that the rock was climbable from the back, and proceeded to ascend it at once. On the top he was amazed to discover an enormous collection of branches and sticks which reminded him of another pile of similar trash with which he had to deal not so very long previously in the beaver lake. In the top of the mass was a mild depression that had once been lined with twigs and smaller sticks, while about this depression were the skulls and other bones of many small animals and birds, such as rabbits, prairie dogs, a heron, and what is this? A turtle, sure enough, and dried like a buffalo chip! In spite of his headache and the haze forming before his eyes, our boy found interest enough to think to himself as he picked

up the specimen; "Well, Little Brother! you came to a pretty end."

Faintness caused the traveler to cast himself at the foot of the homely little tree. From this point of vantage a wonderful view of the valley could be had with very little exposure to himself. But it was inordinately hot and oppressive, especially so to one in Queer Person's state of exhaustion and hunger. He had eaten little the morning before, and meantime had crossed a great mountain pass.

"This tree looks like the Twisted One," thought Queer Person as he leaned back and studied its ugly shape. He imagined its branches swayed in reply.

"You and this deserted eagle's nest and I must be good friends, for to-night we shall need great courage. The bad gods and the good gods will battle here for our pleasure."

Because he was so near the great cliff, the afternoon sun disappeared early, leaving half the valley in purple shadow for the longest twilight he had ever known. Now along the river's edge just beyond the marsh which our wanderer had crossed ran a game trail, and the hollow, tired

eyes suddenly saw the splash of water under some alders, and then a doe ran into the open at top speed. Ouff! something to see, something taking place, something to keep one awake!

But the mind of the watcher was suddenly filled with apprehension, for no sooner had the deer disappeared up the river than two men equipped for hunting came into view, hopping from grass tussock to tussock. Once out in the open sufficiently to command a clear view of the marsh, they stopped and took a careful survey of their surroundings. With all the ghost-like deliberation used by the burrowing owl as he backs down a prairie-dog hole, our seeker settled himself behind the rubbish heap. Twice it seemed the eyes of the two hunters were rather vacantly cast on his lofty place of hiding, but roamed away. Then they continued their journey in the direction taken by the deer. Queer Person felt certain they were Shoshones, but as their garments were the plainest and their quivers bore no distinctive decorations, he was left to wonder. To his horror he spied his robe out there in plain sight. Certainly the good gods had made it invisible.

HE SEIZED A CLUB AND STRUCK AT THE BIG BIRD

Hunger weakness was getting in its work. Pains now seized him across the abdomen and groins; a chill ran down through his body. The sun having sunken, the valley was in immediate dusk. He reached for his robe and pulled it over his feverish body. Shadows began to pass to and fro before his eyes, some very large, others mere specks. Many had no shape at all, while others assumed the forms of familiar animals. One in particular fascinated him, it was so terrifying. It was an eagle having a wing spread unbelievably wide, and the fowl lit on the edge of the nest. He hid his face lest it talk to him, but even with eyes averted he knew it was making signs. He tried to wave it off, but it kept on repeating its speeches, after each of which it refolded its wings as though just alighting. This repeated action became so trying to Queer Person that he seized a club and struck at the big bird; then he grappled with it. Its eyes were blue like lightning; not at all like the yellow eyes of the eagles with which he was acquainted.

Finally he was overpowered by the enemy, which stood over him signing with its wings: "Come; I need you as food for my little ones.

Never mind bringing that dead turtle. Do not resist or I shall tear you to pieces right here." So saying, the huge creature seized him and bore him to such cold gray heights that he was shaken with dizziness when looking down. During the last second before being lifted away from the earth he had grasped the dried turtle, which he now held in the left armpit out of sight. When they reached the nest of the great bird Queer Person felt himself dropped on a ledge, while his captor continued on up the mountain. There before him were two young eagles of such gigantic size that the seeker felt himself a mere dwarf, not even enough for one.

As they came toward him he suddenly held out the dried reptile, not knowing exactly why. When lo! the ugly young giants became apparently blinded, for they searched all over their nest and failed to find the quarry. With that, the dead turtle became a living sand-hill crane, a bird much prized by the Blackfeet peoples, and bade the lad hasten himself upon its back. The crane flew away down through the cold cloudy heights to the rocky citadel near the river again. Once there, this friendly bird said: "I must hurry

with my message for you now, lest that big eagle come back," and here the crane ran to the edge of the little island of rock and scanned the skies.

"When you get back to your people you must get the skins of two summer badgers, tan them, and make a bag in which you must keep for all time the following sacred articles: a dried turtle, some of my feathers, the berries of the trailing juniper——"

"Oh, I know right now where I can get some!" waved Queer Person wildly.

"Now, don't interrupt, for I must hurry," said the crane, and he again scanned the skies for the enemy. "Find two or three mussel shells that are dark purple inside. If you can get some colored insect wings——"

"Grasshoppers?" asked the anxious hands.

"Yes, they will do. Lots of them." Just then a huge shadow slid over the two talkers, and looking up they saw the great eagle circling toward them, his angry blue eyes sending out long jagged streaks into space. The poor crane was so terrified that he fluttered away into the marsh, while Queer Person had just time enough

in which to seize a stout club in his trembling hands and begin waving it wildly over his head. Then suddenly the dream broke, vanished, cleared, and the boy found himself standing in the middle of the great nest brandishing a club as large as his arm.

He looked down across the marsh, for it was broad daylight, and the sun was coming over the eastern mountains. There stood the two hunters again, with pitifully frightened eyes fixed on the insane apparition away up in the eagle's nest. Although he was unaware that he was making any sounds, Queer Person really was emitting terrific animal-like cries, like the bellowing of a bull, and straightway he fell to throwing cudgels, and sticks of all sizes in a perfect torrent at the hunters, who, by the way, were entirely out of range.

Making the sign for crazy, they clapped their hands over their mouths in alarm and sped down the river valley. The poor starved seeker, having spent his very last ounce of strength in this fierce outburst, allowed his arms to drop; then, feeling himself about to fall, stretched out one hand to stay himself, when alas! that hand was impinioned on a small broken stub of pitch on the

friendly, crooked little tree. Too late, he sank into darkness, the one hand torn and bleeding, trapped some distance higher on the tree trunk.

How long after this it was that he felt himself being moved, he had not the faintest idea. Anyhow, it was very cool, probably night, and he was being gently swayed to the motion of a horse. Consciousness was coming in short glimmerings. His eyes did not open, but certain things were becoming clear nevertheless. Now he felt the flat support of a hand against his thigh; then again he was aware that the horse was going up grade. How was he fastened to the horse? Yes, he was tied on, and two buffalo robes were between him and the back of the pack animal. Then a mighty pain grew in his left hand. This brought his eyes open with a snap. The hand was bandaged with something wet. Who was this leading the horse and holding one open palm against him to stay the swaying motion? None other than Middle Rider! And what was it all about? The grade was mostly downward now and it was so easy just to relax as he was! But the watchful eye of Middle Rider soon detected that his passenger was awake. Instantly the little

party halted and the sick one was laid on the grass, yea, real grass, for they had descended below the belt of eternal needles, and the great black coverings of the mountains lay far behind. And here was food! blessed pemmican from a wee pack! Middle Rider was signing:

"You had this in your hand for a long time, but I was afraid you might lose it, so placed it in my pack." Queer Person reached out and took the dried turtle, turning it over several times thoughtfully. He was about to tell his teacher of the turtle. That's so, one must not even tell his friends about the medicine dream until after having been to war. The whole story came back to him in waves until his excitement arose.

"Was it a strong dream?" asked the older man.

For answer, the boy gave the sign for mountain and forest fire. They both knew this meant "rather wild." They smiled. The halt rested him much, and this time the boy mounted with only a little aid from the warrior. At the next rest the story of the hurt hand came out. Then followed an account of how the warrior had been asked to take the trail of the truth seeker, lest

some dire thing befall him. To send a guard was a custom nowise uncommon, although the young people starting on these trips were always led to believe that they were to do the whole thing alone.

"Did you see the two Shoshones?" asked Middle Rider.

Queer Person thought a moment. This was not part of the dream, so could be told; hence he related the account of how two Shoshone hunters had driven a deer past the eagle's nest the evening of his arrival there. But this was not the incident in the warrior's mind. In amazement and no small amount of mirth the two enjoyed the stick-throwing affair and the hasty retreat of the hunters, not one bit of which had Queer Person recalled.

At last they were crossing the grass meadows of the valley; and, sure enough, there in the edge of the cottonwoods, the camp in the background, stood old Granny leaning on her staff, one gnarled hand shading her eyes. Her mouth was working with emotion, and when the four dogs came romping toward the horse and two men it must be told that tears of joy and relief came

to the old woman's eyes. The Twisted One appeared all covered with awe and respect and a wee bit of fear! His bosom pal had been for his dream and was home safe once more! Then Granny whispered to the smaller boy:

"Go now, he will want to be alone for a time." So with reluctant step and backward glance the crooked little figure disappeared. Once on the ground, Queer Person found all four dogs standing with front paws on him, sniffing at his hands, the bandage, the turtle, his robe, and all, seeking to get as much of the story as possible. Where had the young master been so long?

Then the seeker entered that raggedest of tepees to rest and rest and rest.

CHAPTER VII

"I'll Ride the Thing!"

WHO wants to live with a yearling, anyhow?

Well, in truth, probably none of them really did, but so many were the reasons for its being in the camp in the first place that the question was not readily solved, mostly because no one person seemed to take authority. The creature left one day, and in a manner quite unexpected.

A year before, the father of two little boys, twins, had brought them a pet in the shape of a yellow buffalo calf. Both the boys and the calf were quite innocent in the matter, and for a time everybody enjoyed him, for he became quite tame and managed to cut some most entertaining capers as he played at the end of his picket rope. For weeks he was fed on mare's milk; then the little boys weaned him to a diet of river grass. The calf's black horns were like little India rubber stubs and of course required trying

on anything that would stand for it. When he was small his hump was barely noticeable, but now it was grotesque, like a deformity. It was rather entertaining to see the little hunchbacked creature stand off and take mild bumps at the boys who played with him, but as he grew these charges became more and more serious, and his added weight made them dangerous. Some there were who tormented him until he was out of humor a good deal of the time. He grew too large for the twins to manage, and they even lost interest in him. So in time he ran at large throughout the camp as nobody's property.

These butting tactics continued until many a hateful situation arose. Little folks were not safe out at play. Old people hesitated to go abroad, and women were not able to lean over at their work. (A custom of leaning over yet standing, to do a thousand and one little sorts of work, has marked Indian life since history began.) As a final resort everybody carried big clubs for safety's sake. The men laughed a good deal about it, knowing all the time something would have to be done sooner or later.

Finally, one day, it was decided in this man-

ner: The camp had just settled itself again after a long march, and there was one travois horse awaiting the will of its mistress, when the calf came along, not one bit exhausted by the trip, and proceeded to rub his growing horns on the left hand pole of the travois. This kept up until the horse kicked at the buffalo, at which the little thing backed off and charged the horse full tilt.

This was too much; away went the horse, bucking enormously and scattering household goods over a considerable expanse of prairie, all to the huge entertainment of the populace. The woman whose horse had been tormented appeared in wildest dudgeon. She announced to all the big boys in hearing, and two were her own, that she herself would kill that beast by the next sun-up if it were not cared for otherwise. The men stopped laughing and decided to lend a hand, for it had run on long enough. So all the boys in camp decided to have a bucking contest before the butchering.

It was about this time that Queer Person grew aware that a large gathering of young people was forming in the camp arena. It was his

custom not to join large groups; he was too often the butt of their rough jokes. So he slipped behind a cottonwood trunk to watch. A little twig dropped at his feet, but he gave it little attention until another landed in the same place, at which there was a catlike recoil of his oiled muscles. Looking over in another tree he saw the small pan-like figure of the Twisted One perched in a grandstand seat of his own, ready to view the spectacle, whatever it was to be. A rope about the middle of the young buffalo caused him to cavort in a fierce manner, but as the boys commenced riding him, one at a time, he grew more evil in his intentions. Not only did he buck them off, but he charged them, inflicting many serious bruises before the riders could regain their feet. The treatment was so strenuous, however, that in time he was played out and merely stood still in a sulky attitude. Then some bully called out:

"There isn't a girl here who dares ride the calf!"

Most of the girls were collected in a group at one side. Now they commenced to giggle, some laughed outright, some turned their backs, and

a few called out impertinent remarks. Finally one voice rose above the din:

"I'll ride the thing!"

People turned to see who the daring girl could be, and lo! it was none other than Singing Moon, daughter of the chief. She whispered to several girls of her age, then dove into a neighboring tepee, only to reappear presently, ready for the ride. They waited until the calf had regained his breath somewhat, then readjusting the rope, she mounted and called for them to clear the way. From beneath her skirt she produced a heavy quirt. Cries of disapproval arose!

"No fair! No fair!" But it was too late; the quirt was brought down under the belly of the astonished animal, so that he leaped clear off his feet. Before he negotiated a fair-sized crow hop the quirt bit into the other side, so that he was soon running at top speed. The way cleared; there was no doubt about it, and the animal headed for the hills. Every time his speed slackened, the quirt came into action again. Then the camp saw beast and rider disappear over a little ridge, reappearing on one farther away, and then out of sight

"She'll leave it in the hills," somebody said, "but it will come right back."

Singing Moon and some girl friends had returned from that direction with some horses not long before this show started, and they had seen something that lent method to the madness of this rider. After topping the second little ridge the girl dismounted. Her steed was more than docile now; he was ready to quit altogether. She petted him a little, then urged him down a trail that led through deep sage. Meantime, the girl studied the bottom of a wide coulee. Sure enough, there was just what she hoped to see: a small band of wild buffalo, mostly cows and calves with a few two-year-olds. Urging the yearling forward, she was at length relieved to see that he had spied the wild relatives ahead and had quickened his pace.

About this time the girl dropped behind in the sage, for well she knew the dangers entailed in meeting those shaggy cattle yonder with no horse at hand. One of the wild cows raised her head and gazed at the newcomer intently, a few idle straws of prairie grass in the corners of her mouth. Dried sage leaves clung to the woolly foretop

between the black horns. A deep-toned snort escaped through her black nostrils, and she took several rapid and high steps toward the stranger. Others of the band followed her. Meantime, the calf maintained his course.

The girl crept back up the slope in the hidden trail and never did know the last of the act. Anyhow, the beast never appeared in the camp again. Passing through a band of horses on her way back, she placed the short rope used on the calf about the nose of a gentle mount, leaped to his back, and rode into camp as leisurely as though nothing important had taken place. Some small amount of malicious jeering reached her ears; but, for the most part, she was highly praised for her clever trick and the courage exhibited therein.

Riding straight to her father's tepee, Singing Moon dismounted, removed the rope from the head of her horse, and sent him back to the herd with a sharp crack.

At this moment someone behind her spoke. It proved to be old Granny.

"Hist! our chief has a little son! And you have a brother! Now the old heart of Big Pipe will be

happy, for he can rear a leader for his people like himself."

The escapade with the buffalo calf was swept from the girl's mind in a flash. For a moment she was all contrition for having left her mother She was ready to burst into tears. Granny was gently leading her to that raggedest of lodges, saying, meantime:

"I have just left your father's lodge. Been there all day. They are sleeping while your father smokes and watches."

The joy of it! a young chief, her little brother! Unable to restrain her joy at this news the girl wept in old Granny's arms. In a remarkably short time the whole camp was agog with the news. Granny was quick to seize a dramatic moment. She loved being the center of importance and had done her best as a harbinger of information these many years, and this proved anything but one of her lesser moments.

Years before, Big Pipe had stepped into the responsibilities of his own father. It does not always follow that chieftainship is hereditary among Plains Indians. His grief over the fact that no son had come into his life to stay was

more poignant as the years passed; hence this fine healthy little boy was more welcome than all the gifts of the gods. It had been whispered with good authority that the council considered proposing the name of Middle Rider for the next leader of the band, and it is to be noted right now that Middle Rider exhibited his manhood by being the first to stake a fine horse at the doorway of the chief's lodge as a gift for the little son. Several old councilmen followed suit, turning away proudly with robes drawn about their shoulders in royal dignity. Women brought gifts by the armful to the doorway. People stood about and whispered in groups. Finally the chief came forth, his robe high over his ears, and walked straight to a neighboring hill, where he stood against the sky. Presently he chanted prayers to the Four Winds, pointing the stem of his sacred pipe in the respective directions as he proceeded:

"O East Wind! from whence comes the Sun, make the strength of rivers flow in the blood of my boy.

"O South Wind! where go the birds in winter, cause storms to pass over his head, leaving him

unharmed! Cause them to leave their strength with him.

"O West Wind! where goes the Sun at nighttime behind the world, give my boy muscles in his body like the antelope.

"O North Wind! where lives Cold Maker, leave my son with his people until his head is like the snow that lives always on yonder mountain top.

"O Mother Earth! from whom all things grow, fill the spirit of his warrior children with thoughts that make chieftains.

"And O Natosi! Sun Power! when my son takes the trail through the sand hills, do not cause him to dwell on the Hungry Island, but take him to the country where the hunting is always happy!"

Next day they christened the babe "Sun Pipe."

CHAPTER VIII

Those Growing Pains in His Head

The summer that Queer Person and Singing Moon were sixteen years old the girl joked him mildly about the size of his feet and hands. She teased everybody, old and young without discretion, sometimes to her sorrow. People wondered how a daughter of such mild parents could possess so many fiery characteristics. But, with all her teasing, she spared the deaf boy, more than others. He really was so different. Granny often came to his rescue by stating in sign language for the benefit of the tall ungainly boy that big hands and feet were for people who were going to need them as giants! The Twisted One stood near by to gather in some of the fun, for he was an established member of the trio, the girl and the two strange boys. Everybody enjoyed the Twisted One, he was so comical in spite of his misfortune. His agility was positively

squirrel-like, and at times the girl watched his alert face and declared that all he lacked were the tufts on the tips of his ears!

The village was on the move again, of course, and it was on one of Granny's rheumatic days. She always had headaches when she was about to get one of her hunches, and her young associates had learned to expect them. People did not disregard Granny's hunches. Credence was in order when the old witch commenced to prophesy, but the thing that came to pass in their lives during the next few days was destined to remain a secret several seasons. Indian women are given to hunches more than people of any other race. One may call it clairvoyance, intuition, or what not, but it follows as fact. Recognizing her mood, Queer Person was somewhat timid when he asked her permission to remain behind for another night alone. She was already mounted, ready to go with the caravan. She studied him a moment.

"Hunting beaver again?" she asked testily.

"No, just my medicine talking," his agile hands replied. She had an irritating way of answering questions in part with her hands and

then absent-mindedly rambling off into vocal grumblings that meant absolutely nothing to him. Grumbling was one of her strong points and it was so hard to grumble with one's hands! While yet a little fellow he had developed the custom of standing very close to her, even leaning against her when things did not come his way rapidly enough. Forgetting that he was now nearly grown, he unconsciously performed this little mannerism on this particular occasion, but in addition, half peevishly and half affectionately, he rapped gently on her knee with one knuckle. Now this would not have been unfortunate in the least if it had been the other knee, but this particular one was smoldering with her rheumatism, and quick as a flash she cuffed at him on one ear and then on the other, not very hard but enough to bring color, signing at the same time:

"Be gone, and good riddance to you!"

Then the caravan moved away. As Granny's horse passed Queer Person he playfully ran a firm thumb along the animal's ribs, causing him to lash out with his heels, nearly upsetting the old woman. Everybody laughed. Soon he was alone. There were times when he did not even want

his playmate, the Twisted One. The camp was searched for the usual scraps and leavings with the usual meager results; then he sought a sleeping place in the brush where he could look out and feel so safe; oh, so safe! in all the glory of his solitude.

Night was settling with a leisurely gloom. He loved it! The distant mountains seemed so stiff and hard in the twilight. A million odors came across the cooling air with the released moisture of everything. But what was this headache that had come on during the past few days, and why was it especially acute this evening? Granny had told him not long ago that it was the bones in his head trying to grow. He began thinking of bones and skulls and recalled a human skull that he and Middle Rider had discovered in a dry wash once. They had dismounted to examine it, and Queer Person had been instructed that in very young children those zigzag joints across the top were wide open, and that they had to grow shut before he became a man. Yet this would not account for the pain he had at present. It was much lower on the sides of his head than that. If these were growing pains,

what size would his head be in the morning?

Sleep is a cousin to age. It comes unawares. It does things to people. But, of the two, the results of sleep are preferable, of course. Hence at sunrise our boy was ready to click his heels together. All of his troubles had vanished. He was starting a gloriously happy day of solitary exploring. Creek bottoms, rim rocks, bleached bones, and dusty trails all drew him. The fact that his hair gave a ratty appearance, with its grass seeds and bits of leaves from the rabbitlike nest in which he had slept, was of no concern to his misanthropic happiness. At first glance one might have said the fellow was half awake, and at the second that he never slept! His sluggish adolescence had no social pride as yet. So, throwing the strap of his quiver over his shoulder, taking a drink from the stream, he pulled his belt a notch tighter and was ready for the day. Food? Who wanted food except what might turn up in the course of the day?

Half the day was gone—yes, his foot could be placed on the shadow of his head. At a bleached buffalo skeleton he found a beautiful red churt arrowhead with barbs so perfect that he was all

aglow with praise for the artist who made it. Only a limited number of his own people were skilled in this manufacture. It was being slowly lost, due to the introduction of iron from a mysterious people—the Bear People, as they were known because of the hair on their faces—who came into the Indian country to trade for furs. Of course, Queer Person himself had never seen any of these people; in fact, only one of the old men had ever faced any of them. Big Pipe had seen them at a distance, and one society of his band made it a point to trade with a certain small group of Sioux at a given river fork. Hence the iron arrowheads. Middle Rider was quite skilled in flint work and had found an apt pupil in the mute. In fact, he hoped Queer Person could make it a regular occupation, since he was destined to be shut out of so many other normal things.

While examining his newly found red treasure our boy was annoyed to find the pains in his head returning. Pocketing the churt point in the ever-present pouch on his belt, he pressed his fingers to his temples, then the base of his skull. Surely his distress was due to lack of food! Finding wild

raspberries along the river brush, he partly satisfied his hunger; then, pondering the fact that the trail between him and camp was long, he broke into the famous Indian dogtrot that only the prairie athlete knows so well. The entire body is utterly relaxed. This jogging gait, only a walk multiplied by two, is a "road eater" and can be improved upon by nothing but the wolf himself.

But the day was still and stifling. A breeze would have been a godsend. Across sage flats he trotted, up and down lazy slopes, sometimes completely lost to view in dry runs bordered by steep cut banks. Then again his smooth brown back was cut sharply against the sky for an instant as he topped some ridge. Thus did our boy ooze his way over the ever-changing landscape. His eyes were always busy, nothing was lost; seldom did he stop. Little fellow creatures in the shapes of rabbits, badgers, prairie dogs, coyotes, all received mere glances, for this was his busy day.

He took time to visit a pack rat's nest, seemingly a wilder heap of rubbish than the beaver house had proved. It was composed of small

sticks, buffalo chips, bits of bone, and, in fact, anything that could be transported by this animal. The whole outside and especially trails leading to the openings of the house were guarded by prickly-pear cactus leaves that had been carefully nibbled off at the base. Thought the boy to himself:

"You know how to ward off pursuers! What a bristling tepee you do build!" Just then the big ears, protruding eyes, and huge, active whiskers of the rodent himself appeared at one of the entrances. These two wild creatures studied each other a brief moment; then with a laugh Queer Person proceeded.

One long slope proved more trying than others, but he could not tell whether it was the heat or his head pains that oppressed him more. Gaining the top of the ridge, he decided it was neither, but his trouble came from the raspberries! He wished he had never seen the things! Intense nausea overcame him and he lay down on the ridge for some time, his face buried in his arms. Suddenly an excessively sharp, wrenching pain tore through the left side of his head, causing his lithe figure to double into knots and un-

double into ropes. During this writhing, lo! something snapped in his head and was followed by a dull roar, a sensation he had never experienced, after which the pain subsided in a marked degree. The roar swelled and dimmed, giving him the decided conviction that he was losing his mind.

Something was certainly loose in his left ear —an article of some sort, for it gave a rattling sensation. Vigorously he shook his head over his open palm. To his complete alarm there lay what appeared to be a dried, hard worm, very short and compact. Fearful thought! Had a worm been living in his head? His hands tremblingly sought the little pouch where the article was deposited. By all means Granny was to be consulted on this at once. As he took up the trail his steps faltered, but the motivating result of fear is action; so a feeble run carried him forward. Down through a wide bottom he trotted. Every pore was now a fountain. He longed for water but knew it was a long distance, and he could not afford the time to seek the river. Besides, the trail would enter the river valley before he reached camp. The pain, greater than before,

came on him again, more general throughout his head, so that his sight seemed blurred. Then it quite suddenly concentrated in his right ear. Topping another crest, he sank to earth, and rolled about, his arms locked tightly about his head, groaning and twisting, until finally kind nature came to his assistance and his consciousness drifted away into the clouds.

As he lay there the whole night long little things came to look at him, his little brothers the cottontails, the jack rabbits, tiny mice with white feet, and a long-tailed kangaroo rat visited him. Night brought other things, even pretty moths, a large owl skimming the tops of the sage, wolves, too. Wolves never molested people in those days of great game herds. They studied him from a short distance, walking in circles.

It was with a start that he awoke, and he sat bolt upright. His dull orbs roved in a half-senseless manner over a scarcely perceptible horizon. He knew it was toward morning because the air was so chilly. Since he had no robe, the cold was intense. He longed for a robe; it was pain to be without it. The east promised a sun, for color was showing, but the chill of dawn

ruled the world. Where had he been? How came he on this hill, alone? Where were Granny, the Twisted One, the dogs, the great camp? Not a horse in sight, not a tree, not a lodge, not a person! Where, oh, where was he?

Then memories of the previous day began to drift like mist across his picture; the raspberries, the heat, the long slope, the awful pains in his head, and at last that terrifying thing that came from his left ear. With this thought he inclined his head, for he had been sitting up some moments. A rattling movement in his right ear startled him into a violent trembling. When he shook his head over an open palm again a similar object appeared from the right ear. Must have broken loose during the pain just before he "died" and his soul went wandering. (To faint was a species of death to old-time Plains people.) The second fearsome object was placed in the pouch. A dull creeping sensation of his skin came up his back and over his neck as he gazed dumbly into the pouch at the two objects. He covered them.

A slight breeze stirred the grass near by and swept gently over his face, and at the same time

a mild and not altogether unpleasant roar passed through the boy's ears. It rose and fell as the sensation of the breeze grew and receded from his naked face and chest. Stiff and sore though his body was from the cramps and exposure, he was quite rested and stood erect. Things darkened and blurred for a moment. Daylight was here at last. A wan smile was creeping over his pinched face. This was the third day without food, but who wanted food when he half believed some great change was coming over him, might make him like the rest of the world? Where could Granny be at this moment, and why was he not with her, that his many questions might be answered at once? Fear and annoyance struggled for ascendency.

Running was but a feeble gait at first that morning. As the sun warmed him more strength came. Then in a little while the good gods certainly did hear his prayer, for there was a little stream near some very scrubby cottonwoods. The water refreshed and stimulated him so that the next long stretch passed with considerable ease.

Hope, expectancy, excitement, all supply a vol-

ume of power that will dispell for a while at least the worst fatigue. Thus it was that Queer Person discovered he could command a third and even a fourth "wind." The trail left by the moving village was very plain now, and our wanderer cast much of his customary precaution aside and traveled openly in the travoix tracks. The sun at last declined, shadows lengthened and turned to purple, and the traveler came down to a walk. His gait grew more and more halting. Twice he nearly fell but regained himself to plod on. But suddenly he stumbled, and, try as he might, his legs would no longer sustain him. It was hard to choke back the sobs of discouragement and disappointment. He did so want to reach Granny and have the questions answered! Had he but known that camp lay only a dozen arrow flights around the next river bend, his strength might have borne out, but now his despair was so intense that things grew black, and he lay quite still.

A hundred times during the last two days had Granny left her work that she might study the prairie, only to return with a growing misgiving in her heart. Something spoke of calamity.

During the long day shimmering heat waves made it hard to peer into the distance, and her old eyes proved none too effectual. If only the sizzling distance would yield up the precious, familiar trotting figure of her boy! At sunset the dogs sat apart from her, ears up, watching the south trail. One could not live so closely with four beasties like these dogs and not know many of their thoughts and much of their language. If only Middle Rider would come home! Finally, unable to endure the suspense longer, Granny untied the picket rope of the old horse, adjusted the crude saddle—much like a white man's pack saddle—managed with much difficulty to mount the animal alone and rode out on the trail. The dogs created a furor, leaping up to her stirrups one moment and making short sallies out on the trail the next, barking furiously all the time. The village fires were twinkling when she was fairly under way, but, in dog language, who was afraid to leave the protecting circle of the fires now that Granny and a horse were along? The little party had only a short way to go, for soon they came upon the loved one lying in the trail. The dogs wagged their tails vigorously and

whined, poking wet noses against his flesh in frantic endeavors to gain recognition. It was not until Granny turned the boy over so she could see his face that he awoke sufficiently to attempt sitting up. Patience, labor, and time—the three cardinal elements in the lives of Indians—finally placed the boy on the horse. Encouragement and a pair of ever-so-gentle ugly hands helped him keep his seat; so he wound his fingers securely in the mane of the old sorrel and summoned his will power as never before.

He slept for two solid days, and a flush in his cheeks denoted some fever on the third day. Raising himself on his elbow, he studied Granny's face. She was speaking partly to the dogs and partly to herself. Yes, he could hear her voice, but could not understand, of course. As he watched her certain strange sensations came over the muscles of his throat until at last, yielding to the tendency, a coarse sound came from his mouth. He could hear it. It was his own voice! Instantly Granny bent a piercing eye on him. He tried not to smile, but the secret was so good that he was forgetting all self-control.

"What do you want?" signed Granny as usual.

"My belt and pouch," his hands replied. Those were brought, and with a returning sense of fear he explored the interior of the parfleche container, then finally laid the two strange objects in the hand of the old woman. Tapping her shoulder with a weak hand, he asked:

"Are they really worms that lived in my head?" Followed a lifting of old eyebrows and pursing of wrinkled lips. He gave her the whole story. A homely smile exposed her two yellow teeth, and her hands began to fly excitedly. It was some time before she could explain satisfactorily enough to reassure him. She finally told him the story of a little child she had known years before, who had been very ill with fever, and that later some objects like these had come from his ears. Furthermore, the objects were not worms at all, but an excessive accumulation of what should be there in small quantities when one is well. We know it is nature's way, but Granny had no name for it.

"But I can hear now," said the hands. "I do not understand what I hear. Shall I ever learn?" He was near tears.

This news was so astounding and welcome to

the old soul that she could not refrain from tears herself. A spell of hysterical laughing seized her! In the midst of these demonstrations she stopped as suddenly as she started. Could anybody possibly have overheard her and thus come to learn the cause? Peering from the door, she was consoled on this point, for only the dogs were there, and what a safe audience! Satisfied that their secret was quite secure, she laid a perpendicular finger on her lips, as though the boy might any moment break out into talking. At second thought she knew full well that he could not actually talk for many moons. As he would be making raucous sounds for some time it remained to be seen if his speech were merely arrested or defective.

A twinkle of mischief lurked in her little, beady eyes. Hers was a simple wit, but not common, for it savored of thunderbolts on occasions. She tried him out, asking him to imitate certain sounds which she produced in her own throat, and to her almost limitless joy he made very fair imitations. Then she gave him certain familiar words which he had been reading by lips all these seasons and found these rather easy for him

to repeat. So it was, that right here began the teaching of the boy's language. Granny wished she could do it in a day!

"Once I sent you off for your Medicine Dream," signed the old woman. "But I feel this is a greater medicine trip than anyone ever made before. I have a message for you, my son, that may make you most powerful. It is this: If you can keep all this a secret—for you will soon be able to talk as other people—I know you will have one of the greatest medicines that ever came to our people. The people must learn the great secret at a time when it will bring *you* the most good, not them. To keep so great a secret perfectly will give you self-control like the mountains. And to think they called you an idiot!" Here she laughed long and loudly, until she cried again. Her conduct mystified the boy. What was there in all this to make her cry? Surely her head was not in pain. Surely no worms had lived in her head!

"But," asked the lad with a pained expression on his face, "how is one to remain silent when he hears things all the time?"

"Pretend, my son, play, act out what is not

so. Men do that in gambling. You have known how to play an idiot for some time, and you have known that people suspected you of being one. Knowing this, you have at times played the part too well. Meanwhile, I shall teach you to speak and sing and pray as we do with our lips and voices instead of hands."

During the next season not a soul in the village suspected the least part of the drama being enacted in that raggedest of lodges. Queer Person took to his arrow making with a new vigor, making it quite a business, and people came to trade for his arrows, they were so beautifully balanced. Who couldn't make arrows or most anything, when such a promising inspiration was burning within him all day and all night? In his lessons with Granny, he came to find it a relief to speak vocally with her rather than lay down his tools every time they exchanged ideas. In times past he had been conscious of the activity going on in Granny's little tom-tom only by the cool waves of vibration felt on his bare knees. He used to sit close to her so he could feel them. Now he could hear the tones without any old knees! Sounds like wind

in grass, or in trees, rain patter on the tepee, the wash of the river, bird calls, barking of dogs, and neighing of horses—all came to be familiar to him in short order. They enriched his life until his happiness was hard to contain.

One of the sounds he loved most was the soft, hissing purr of little flames from the fire after they had gone to bed. Peoples' voices bewildered him. They were complex and varied. To distinguish the meaning when identical syllables were rendered at different pitch was most discouraging, almost insurmountable! But Granny was always ready with gentle patience, for she meant to see this wonderful thing through. Often his eyes dropped to his hands in a slightly wistful manner. He turned the palms up slowly. Those hands had been doing double service these many summers and winters! No matter if things had changed for them. He would be good to those hands!

Voice talk grew less formidable daily, but a new trouble came, so that he was constantly put to the test of self-control. He gathered in uncomplimentary things about himself, and it was necessary to call on all his secret medicine

to maintain a face of stone. In the chief's tepee, where he was always a welcome visitor, he learned for himself for all time just what the chief thought of him. An aged warrior had come to talk over serious matters of tribal concern one day, when the visiting old man stopped and eyed Queer Person intently a moment, then remarked:

"Better send that boy out of here."

Big Pipe answered: "No need. He reads some by lips, but is otherwise deaf as a rock. We always allow him to stay, for he is harmless because he is good. Some day look at his eyes."

At that moment those very "seeing" eyes were consciously bent low over his hunched knees. Could the men have suspected the tears that came when Queer Person learned that the chief had such faith in him, there is no telling what might have happened that day. The first great good that his new ears brought to him was proof that his chief, Big Pipe, loved him.

And what soul was so small as not to seek the love of Big Pipe?

CHAPTER IX

A Tryst with the Ghosts

One day a group of women were busy making a new tepee in a shaded place amid the cottonwoods. Singing Moon joined them. Some of the women had developed a mild aloofness for this girl warrior about whom there was more legendry than might exist in the lives of other daughters were they to live a hundred winters! While conscious of these subtle changes, however, the girl conducted herself exactly the same as previous to her escapade, laughing and talking with all who acknowledged her. At the particular moment in question she was entertaining the group with such a real take-off on old Granny that even the aloof ones could not refrain from joining the laughter. This little trick, of impersonating the language and manner of some tribal brother or sister had gained the girl the cognomen of "That-talk-laugh-talk Girl."

Suddenly, while the audience was still convulsed, Singing Moon looked into a group of listeners not engaged in the sewing, where she discovered Granny herself. It was evident that the old woman had heard the whole thing! Instantly tears came to the girl's eyes, for she would not have hurt old Granny for the world!—not her own old Granny! She would have fled had not the old woman broken into peals of laughter, a reaction not altogether expected. Limping over to Singing Moon, the old soul gathered the girl into her arms and whispered something in her ear that caused her to look up sharply into the wrinkled face.

"Here," said Granny, "hush those tears and take one of my sticks. Go on over there, pull your hair down, and pretend you have years of your own." No sooner said than done! Assuming an exaggerated limp and an altogether too realistic hump in her back, Singing Moon walked off a little distance. In imitation of Granny in cold weather she drew her knuckles across her brow, placed one thumb on the side of her shapely nose, blew vigorously, and was ready for the drama. The expression she presented was such

as to throw the group into noisy approval. But when people saw the look Granny assumed herself, done to a chief's taste—they all broke into wildest mirth. Even Singing Moon relaxed her awful mask to indulge in mirthful tribute to the old hag. They menaced each other with ugly visages a brief moment, then launched a vitriolic quarrel so real that for a breath or so the audience was doubtful whether the quarrel was real by now. Raucous tones and streams of contumely were poured on the rival heads to the accompaniment of stamping feet and staves, punctuated by wild and threatening fist-shaking. The old woman's reserve was finally broken when Singing Moon hurled one of Granny's pet anathemas in so realistic a manner that Granny broke forth into a cackling laugh.

"Child, thou hast the medicine tongue!" screamed Granny.

Favored indeed was the young man who received gentle or even kindly notice from Singing Moon at the feasts or races or games. In the social dances she created a deal of merriment by choosing to dance between two old men rather than anywhere near the young dandies. This was

her way of testing her powers. She worked in contrary style but arrived at the same conclusion to which other attractive girls came. Gentle torment could move worlds! Distance, playful sarcasm, and ridicule: most potent weapons! Alas! to make direct advances to her at once laid the courageous one liable to almost instant annihilation by her ready wit. Gossip, in so circumscribed a thing as an Indian camp, had the power of enhancing.

"Did you know that Singing Moon said so and so to this one and that one last night?" And so it went. Tongues wagged; all but one, and it lay dumb in the jaws of its owner nine tenths of the time.

"Take this back fat and boss rib to Granny," ordered Goes-before to her children, Singing Moon and the little chief, Sun Pipe. The mother, according to Indian custom, was standing, yet leaning from the hips so that she was cutting the meat on the ground in front of her. So each of the young people took a piece of the meat. Presently they returned, wild eyed.

"Some man is in the lodge talking with Granny!" gasped the girl. "And you remember

what you said once before when we heard this?" The mother straightened; a look of intense sobriety came over her face.

"Did you go close?" asked the mother.

"Almost to the door," replied the little boy, "but the door cloth was down tight." Then the three tiptoed over toward the raggedest of the lodges, so close that they could hear the crackling of little sticks on the fire. Intermittently Granny was speaking like a low-voiced houri, while a deep masculine voice marched with deliberate, pedantic step through the intervals. By and by the talk merged into song, the two voices rising and falling in monotonous cadence, while underneath Granny's tom-tom grumbled along. This was eerie business, standing there actually listening to possible ghosts. The listeners were at first brought closer together for safety's sake. Finally they had enough! They fled as one bird! Once they were safe in the presence of their own firelight, the door cloth was pulled down securely.

"I can't make it out," said the mother wonderingly, staring into the fire, "but it may have been the ghost of her long-ago husband. Perhaps

it was one of her five sons. The husband was killed that time when we got lost in the big storm and ran into the Sioux camp." Singing Moon added:

"Do you remember the time when Medicine Owl lost his 'buffalo rock'? (A sacred stone carried when decoying buffalo.) Well, a boy told me that Granny sang half the night about it and all of a sudden was able to tell him where to find it." Then the little fellow lent his evidence to this mysterious story of the old woman's powers.

"Once she came here in the night to waken me and have me tell our father that some Shoshones were among the pony herds!" This was given in a shrill piping voice that simply would not be hushed to a whisper. "How does she know?" And he sat on the ground, leaning against his mother for further protection. Thus they talked of old Granny's supernatural powers, and thus it was that the old witch herself continued the instruction of Queer Person.

One day Singing Moon grew suspicious, for no particular reason at all, and studied her childhood companion, the mute boy, carefully. His

long knowledgeable hands were cunningly mending a travois basket. "Could it be?" thought the girl. "Is this fellow a faker, a liar?" But no! The cowardly, lurking doubt fled. His conduct and appearance belied all such ponderous deceit. Besides, she had tested him in a thousand little ways of late and had found him wanting in not the slightest way. Poor fellow! he gathered so little from the world of events, yet he seemed not so very sad. Of course, he did not realize what he was missing, and this was fortunate. To her he was merely a big boyish brother. "Wonder why he keeps no care of himself? His hair is long and heavy, but usually in the very state that one finds the foretop of a winter pony. Just where the winds happen to leave it!" Then her courage came to the front. She would ask him. Her hands formed the question.

"Do you ever see ghosts when Granny talks with them?" For a very fraction of a moment his apparently dreamy eyes studied her, but his answer gave no satisfaction if she wished to catch him in deceit.

"I have never seen the ghosts. You know I could not hear them as you do if they did ap-

pear to me. But I know she has talked of them." So she gave it up and was sorry for her doubts. Listen as she would about the mysterious lodge at night, she and her family never again heard Granny communicate with the dead members of her family. Nearly two years passed before matters relating to this topic arose again, and then it was in the most trying and thrilling events that marked the history of the village.

CHAPTER X

Middle Rider's Medicine Was Bad

For days the men had been bringing in summer hides of buffalo and elk bulls. It was the season when the stock of parfleche was renewed. This material is one of the real secrets of the existence of the Plains Indians. The name by which it is commonly known to-day has a different translation in each tribe, of course. Next to the transportable, conically shaped tepee, no important invention has taken its place in their everyday life. The manufacture of this goods required the hardest sort of labor.

The village had been laid out in a region where certain alkali mud holes were at hand. In the common vernacular of the cowpuncher these mud holes are called "soap holes," or "mud springs." The alkaline material in the mud, accelerated by the use of wood ashes, will cause the hair on the hides to loosen and at the same

time partly tan the leather. Great care must be taken not to allow the chemical action and the natural processes of decay to eat holes in the hides. An expert can readily tell when it is time to wash the hides in the river, throw them over a beam, and start the scraping process that removes the hair from one side and the flesh, connective tissue and fat from the other. Correct summer temperature is a great factor in hastening this process of making parfleche. Meantime, it is done at a time when the game is lean, since extra fat means extra work.

Granny and Goes-before had been busy over a number of hides since daylight. Some were very thick and heavy, others smaller, lighter. Queer Person had been whittling stakes about the length of his foot, with which to pin the wet, rubbery hides out flat on the ground. He was making these plenty stout, too, for well he knew the tremendous pulling power in this material once the skins started to dry and shrink. Granny signed for him to cease his work a moment and cover certain smaller hides with grass. They were drying too rapidly, and the sun was likely to bake them. Too strong sunlight often caused

the material to be brittle when finished. Other boys and girls were helping the women here and there to do similar tasks. Sometimes it took days to dry the thicker hides. Great care was exercised in drying them completely, so that they remained perfectly flat. The dried hides were hard, like thin wood but more flexible.

When finished some of the hides were almost clear like glass, while others were pure white and quite opaque. They were cut into various patterns and painted with a variety of geometric and conventional designs, all having special significance, according to the dictates of the artist. Then they were laced at the corners into boxes for fancy work, large containers for pemmican, flat folders for clothes, and cylinders for bonnets, bustles, and feather banners. Many of the large parfleche baskets were deeply fringed with soft buckskin along the margins. These were so made that they might be fastened on pack horses.

"When do you suppose we shall get through with this smelly work?" asked a little girl of her mother. "I want go away from the wire grass around those mud holes. There are too many

sing-sings (mosquitoes) and no-see 'ems (black flies)."

"Yes, we all want to get away, my child," answered the mother. "I am all bitten up like a coyote with scaly skin. The no-see 'ems are very bad."

"The dogs won't stay here," continued the little girl. "See them over there?"—and she pointed over among the horse herds near some little hills on which larger boys were sitting as guards. By and by one woman straightened up from a hide she had been scraping, a large elk-horn fleshing tool in her hand.

"Granny, a scout came in this morning with news that Middle Rider's medicine was bad. Only a handful of the war party that went against the Shoshones are coming back." This was a sudden blow to old Granny, indeed!

"What! he has failed?" called out the familiar raspy voice. "Now what coyote has played him traitor that his medicine went bad? But of course Middle Rider was not hurt?" she asked hastily.

"I don't know," called the woman in return, as she resumed her labor. "The men only stayed a short while and said very little."

The supposed deaf ears of Queer Person had caught all that. He found Granny eying him most knowingly. For the briefest moment the two exchanged glances; then suddenly the old woman pointed with a slight nod of her head to a distant group of riders coming in from the north. Together they studied the group without attracting the attention of the other workers. Then, as if reading each other's thoughts, they went to that raggedest of lodges. Once within the shadowy interior Granny said:

"I fear for my other son,"—and she shook her head mournfully. "Let us wait here until that party comes in. They may be the ones. If not, they will at least have the news." Then said the boy in an undertone:

"Why did you say it was wrong for them to leave on this trip? You said it many times before they started and all that was last moon. Was it because we saw that little red cloud across the young moon three nights?"

"Yes, boy, that was the reason. That is the very worst sign our people know. It is worse than three suns in the winter. I told my other son, but the rest who were to go with him talked

too much. They addled his wisdom." Just as she finished this speech they saw the fragment of the original sacred twenty limp into camp, all the horses, even those being led, so thin and foot-sore that they could scarcely travel. Granny clutched her throat to stay her grief.

"There, Son," she said, pointing a trembling finger toward the sorrowful group, "all that comes from young men not listening to their old folks. The signs of the moon should always be obeyed. Some of these young fellows will never learn to heed the word of the wise. They should not have drowned out the warnings that Middle Rider told me he heard from the good gods and his medicine." Just then they recognized Black-bush-three, the only survivor of the famous trio and a certain very tall man known as Yellow Hand. Both were in the party and looked haggard, indeed.

"See," said Queer Person, unable to prevent a telltale quiver from creeping into his voice, which voice was none too well controlled as yet anyhow, "they are laying my brother's bonnet and clothes at the chieftain's lodge entrance. And, oh! there! they have left the mouse-colored

horse. Would they give him to me, Granny?" asked the lad chokingly. His heart was like rock.

"I would rather be deaf again than ask for it, though!" said the boy with pride. They watched the chief's lodge. No sooner had Goes-before and Singing Moon hurried from among the parfleche workers to examine the horse and bundle of personal belongings than the awful news of the death of a loved one was made manifest by a loud wailing characteristic of all primitive women. Then farther up the village they heard the same cries of distress. For a while Queer Person was doubtful of the joys to be derived from his hearing. This was his first experience with the sounds of his own people mourning their dead. It was more terrible than anything he had heard yet! He wanted to run away. The only man he had known as a brother was dead—alas, dead!

But that day passed, and while many lodges in the camp were mourning there were so many not grieving that matters soon took on the usual air of commonplace activity. The parflechers continued, and it must be said that the chief's

women and Granny took up their work with others in a heavy manner. Finally the hard work was completed and the village trailed away from the evil soap holes and annoying insects to a beautiful grassy park away up the river.

The moon was almost full again. Instead of a long fortnight it seemed ages to the outcast, and what torture he endured during that time! His ears were becoming so acute that a million things reached him that were not intended for him at all. For example, knowing that the numerous conferences with the chief of late had something to do with organizing a party for the purpose of avenging the death of Middle Rider and his companions, Queer Person's curiosity and envy almost caused him to break his oath to Granny. He was on the verge of losing his self-control. But he did a very daring thing instead.

Under pretense of wishing to help care for the chief's little two-year-old son while the others were so busy, and especially since the women were finishing the decorating of parfleche, he frequently carried his arrow-making materials over near the great lodge. Here he was able to catch what was said inside. By asking Granny

many questions upon his return and by patching what he had gathered himself, he had learned that Black-bush-three wished to be the leader of the party. By much persuasion the permission was secured, and the invitations were being given to highly trusted young fellows to join the party. The tribal law of asking an old, tried warrior, some member of the council, to be a member of the sacred twenty, had been observed.

Noting the way matters were going in her son's heart, old Granny was hard put when it came to proving this was not his great occasion. He must wait and be patient another winter and a half. What a lifetime! The boy leaned his head on his knees and groaned.

Just when Granny thought she had succeeded in convincing her son that this was not his opportunity, the whole camp became noisy with war dances, drums, songs, and serenades. A gloriously arrayed party came to the great lodge to serenade the chief and his family. To those who understood it was clear that most of the young dancers hoped Singing Moon would appear and favor them with a smile, for that girl was gaining a reputation for beauty and talents

that few in camp possessed. Queer Person was not altogether ignorant of her beauty. Now that he could hear and was secretly learning to sing himself, to watch these young fellows dance and sing nearly set him wild. To Granny s alarm he arose and ran madly out of the camp into the great prairie. Only the outcast himself knew what grief was poured out to his medicine and the stars that night!

Granny was wondering what would become of all her efforts toward the great triumph that was in store for him if his patience and reserve should break now. Suppose he were to disclose his recovery and beg for admission into the party? They would laugh at him; they would jeer at him and drive him from their midst, calling him idiot and woman man because of his work about camp. They would command him to tell what he had ever learned of the war game! And should this happen Granny dreaded picturing the consequences of the breaking of a heart so proud as that of her son!

By midnight the camp was settling down, fires were burning low, and people were returning home to their beds.

CHAPTER XI

The Advice of Crane's Talk

Singing Moon walked along the river bank with her little brother in her arms. She dearly loved the little brown roly-poly and played with him hours at a time. His four winters had not brought him much size, but were he even larger she would have carried him for the mere love of the act. The summer afternoon was quiet, warm, and extremely lazy. A sleepy old dog trailed at her heels. Her thoughts, if she had any aside from the child, were mostly sad because of the loss of her uncle, Middle Rider, and the effect this loss had upon the beautiful mother, Goes-before. At last she sat down in the shade where she could watch the water as it rippled over the shallows. Suddenly her attention was arrested by the sounds of movement in the tall grass behind her and, turning, she was startled to find Granny quite out of breath and apparently a bit excited

over something she was bursting to tell. The little babe was allowed to play in the grass, while the old woman seated herself beside the girl under the big cottonwood. She took a long breath and slowly unfolded her mission.

"Girl, once when I was your age, a wonderful medicine came to me. I went to war with the men! All this has been forgot by most our people by now, so surely you have never heard of it."

"Why, Granny, you, a woman, and on the war trail?" asked Singing Moon in amazement. "Did old-time people allow that?"

"Not any more than now," explained Granny with haste, looking about lest there might be eavesdroppers. "This was a very sad time and I had to do it. Some of the men were ready to kill me, but I had fast horses and plenty of courage. Besides, my medicine was good and I helped the men through a dangerous battle. I had to fight as hard as they." Here the old woman stopped and studied the intent face of the girl, as if waiting to see the full effect of her words. Apparently not satisfied as yet, she continued:

"There was nobody else in the family to

avenge the death of my brother, and while I was afraid I dared to do it. I was not to let mere blood scare me from honor. Besides, my presence made those warriors fight like mountain lions, those awful long-tailed cats." But now the younger woman had suddenly sensed the purpose of revealing this story to her! Singing Moon flushed in wildest alarm, not daring even to breathe! The thought was almost unbearable. But soon it settled down through her startled mind and took on a certain amusing angle. So preposterous was it that she found it hard to stifle a desire to laugh. That next instant she clutched at Granny's thin old arm nervously, and leaning toward her gasped out:

"Do you mean to say—that I, Singing Moon, could do such an unheard-of thing?" Granny merely returned her gaze for a moment, then slowly nodded. The wise old face crinkled up into a mass of mischievous wrinkles, her eyes lighting with the intense joy she always derived from plots.

"Look, girl," she whispered. "It has been done before, why not again? I can get you ready, and shall lend you my very own little medicine

pouch for protection. But you must not look in it; now promise!"

"But I do not have to promise! I have not even said I would go on this wild chase, yet! Why, Granny, I simply could not do it. What if something awful happened to me! What would become of my mother?"

"If you are wise and careful nothing will happen to you. You must have faith in the spirits." Again the old woman paused.

"But does my father know about this? Does the council know about it?"

"They will sometime. Now stop being a child and think like a woman. Once you are gone I can manage them. They will not be able to change your deeds then. Deeds are changed only before they are done. Wait a moment. Here is somebody who will give you courage." The old figure straightened up and motioned to someone back in the bushes, which act frightened the girl all the more. Their conversation had been overheard! for here was Crane's Talk coming toward them. Instead of looking reproachful over what he may have heard, as the head medicine man of the camp really should, he was smiling with

that most kindly and winning smile that so many of his people had learned to love. There was a deal of mischief in that expression, too. From the looks on the faces of these two old schemers, Singing Moon understood they had planned the whole thing. For want of something else to do the girl gathered up the little brother close to her breast, and pressing her cheek against his fat round face gently rocked him back and forth. At that moment she looked like anything but a woman ready to go to war! Then she said in a tone of mock injury to the old people, smiling the while:

"You two are a pair of old buzzards!" All but the baby laughed.

"Yes, Daughter," said Crane's Talk, sobering down at last, "we mean it all. I had a dream that great danger surrounded Black-bush-three and his party. That they were about to be run over by buffalo in great herds, and that the enemy was thick around them, too. Then suddenly in that dream a woman rode out into the prairie and her medicine was so good that they were all saved. When the dust had cleared I saw plainly the woman was our Singing Moon." All waited,

silently, while the girl pondered over the matter.

"But suppose your dream was the thought of a bad god?" asked the girl, her gaze away out over the shimmering yellow hills. A look of gloom came over the face of Crane's Talk. In deep hurt tones he answered her:

"Daughter, your faith is like the rain that settles dust but does not bring green grass. You have known the dreams of many strong men among our people, including your father, the chief, and great has been the good for us all by following the teachings of these dreams. You must not doubt. To do so gives the bad gods much pleasure. If you heed our words and listen to my dream, you may save some of our best warriors from the Hungry Island, and when you come back the young men will all look to you and let your sisters go by."

"But I don't want the young men to seek me. I am not for anybody. I ask only to remain and care for my little chieftain brother, here, and my parents." A tone of annoyance could be traced through her words. She did not relish this being classed with the run of the young women in her village. She would always be different!

The old people smiled furtively at each other.

"Some day you will, my daughter. All things come in time. Your parents will not last always, and the little chief will grow up into his own life." The old man's attitude was free from ridicule, merely gentle and convincing.

"I'd love to do it!" said the girl. She sighed. "But I do not know just how. I am fearfully frightened. What horses could I take?" Her old advisers grew businesslike the instant they detected this change. What treacherous old things they were! Why! they had planned it right down to the last detail. Said the man:

"The mouse-colored horse is still a bit thin, but he is no longer tender in his hoofs, and his wisdom is great. He is a tried war horse, and larger than most of them. Then there is the pinto you rode in the races. He is no less than the very winds themselves when he runs."

"Ah! but my father would never consent that I should take the fastest war horse in the camp; I, a mere girl on the trail!" She laughed a little, thinking of the expression of concern and surprise that would come over her father's face were this to become true. But all her stubbornness

had not reckoned with the powers of persuasion in the words of Crane's Talk. She found herself trembling ever so slightly as she clung to the happy, cooing baby.

All came to pass, however, as the two old conspirators had arranged. When the finest war horses were picketed within the village limits for safekeeping that evening, both the pinto and the famed mouse-colored mounts were spirited away in the gloom of a thin old thief. Under some pretense or other, the anxious girl had gained permission to spend the night with an aunt higher up in the camp; so when the village dandies in all their finery serenaded her father's lodge later in the night she was not there at all. Together with the wise and tried old medicine man, she waited in the bottom of a draw, where the buffalo grass with its gay little seed heads, so closely resembling tiny pennants, was knee deep on the three grazing ponies. Her war materials were securely packed and strapped to the back of the pinto. Long these two gathered in the sounds of revelry floating out from the camp along the river. Little did some of those very merrymakers know what romance was to be writ-

ten into history during the ensuing few days!

At last there was a change in the quality of voices from camp. Those familiar short, coyote yelps were war cries of a certain fraternity. Crane's Talk raised a warning finger and uttered a single:

"Hist!"

Sure enough, just as he had predicted, the lucky twenty of the war-party were secretly leaving on swift ponies like phantoms. Not a word was being said by any of these riders. They were meeting on a knoll not far from the two watchers. Two at a time, or even singly, they rode from the bottom lands to the point of rendezvous. One passed so near the girl and her old guardian that he surely might have detected them in the semidarkness had it not been for the fact that this was his first invitation to join a war-party. His young heart was pounding as anxiously as that of the girl. His one consuming thought was to join that little gathering on yonder knoll top!

"There, now!" breathed Crane's Talk to Singing Moon. "They spread out and begin the silent ride of the first night. Mount! and fall in

the rear. Remember, do not yield to talk, even though some young warrior does whisper a word to you. It is forbidden; besides, it would spoil your chances. Best not to be too close to anyone." The girl gathered up the jaw rope of the mouse-color, coiled the leash of the pinto, and cast one longing look at her old adviser.

"I wish you were going," she breathed shakily. "I'd feel so much safer."

"But I never could. I am much too old ever to go again. It is well. I have told Tra-kan-to all. He is old and wise. When he helps Black-bush-three make the count in the dawn you will see he is a great gambler. His face will tell them nothing. He will be your friend. Now pray and ride!"

With that the patter of her own horses' hoofs was blended with that of the open ranks ahead of her. For a time she urged considerable speed; then finding herself sufficiently near to appear to be a regular part of the group and yet not intimately close to any other rider, she settled into the gait of the leaders. Thus a woman went to war.

All was still in that great warm prairie night.

Crane's Talk sat alone a moment, his old eyes bent into the darkness in the direction taken by the young riders. At length he uttered that strange little speech so characteristic to the Plains Indians:

"Oeuff! that's enough!" and jogged his quiet mount back to camp.

CHAPTER XII

A Coup Stick and a Strawberry Roan

An ancient rule demanded that no conversation attend the first night's ride. Each man must bend his thoughts on his medicine and pray. To break this rule might wreak disaster on the whole party.

So during the remaining hours of blackness only the regular tattoo of ponies' hoofs on the prairie sod, with the occasional slap of a quirt across the rump of some horse that lagged, broke the silence. Each rider was leading an extra animal, which carried the meager equipment, such as war finery and weapons. These were tied to a wide bellyband of tanned buffalo hide, with hair next to the horse to prevent slipping.

At the first indications of dawn the party stopped for the purpose of counting noses and giving instructions for the day. It is always necessary to check numbers the first morning in

particular, since "the silent ride" might have been the cause of some member becoming separated from the rest of the group while crossing a deep coulee with cut banks, or while passing through a piece of bad lands. A line was formed, after the manner of a troop of cavalry, but lacking the precision. There was a lot of mystery about it there in the early morning, especially to those who were being initiated into the war game.

"How many?" asked the young chieftain. The old man rode close to him and whispered:

"Something wrong, count again." So they both ran over the line again.

"Twenty-one, including ourselves," hissed the younger man, showing his annoyance.

"Someone here uninvited," whispered the counselor. "Try their names."

"As I call names, raise your right hand," commanded the young chief in a low tone. So he called out: "Rain Hawk, Yellow Hand, Paint, White Music, Turns Back, Three Fingers, Ribs, Brown Shield, etc.," until he had completed the list. But there remained one warrior with his extra horse clear at the end of the line, in fact

quite apart. His hand was not raised. All eyes turned toward him and the chieftain heeled the ribs of his mount gently, moving toward the stranger. The older man followed. They gazed at the two horses, not yet being able to identify the rider and not wishing to ask outright, for the Indian always loves to "stall" for time. To delay here was dramatic. Then the old man spoke softly:

"That horse he is riding is the mouse-colored one that was Middle Rider's. But where did that little pinto come from?" Now they were directly before the stranger and both stared intently. The ranks broke, and all the company surrounded the doubtful one. At last someone called out in a shrill tone, at the same time clapping his hand over his mouth in surprise.

"Singing Moon!" The girl's rapid breathing revealed her excitement, but her eye was hard and riveted straight ahead.

Instantly a volume of rumbling broke out among the twenty! Some were violently angry, some too amazed to do more than repeat her name again and again, while several seemed disposed to laugh, among whom was the old coun-

selor. When a semblance of quiet was established the chief said:

"She has broken the sacred number and simply cannot go along. Someone will have to go back with her, for she, being the chief's daughter, must not be endangered. We are already in the edge of the Shoshone hunting lands." A wild roar of dissent went up.

"We shall not go with her. She must risk it alone!" shouted one big fellow. "Nobody asked her to come; why should we yield?" This sentiment drew many words of approval. So it fell finally to the old man to take a hand. He asked:

"Do you know that horse she is riding?"

"Middle Rider's best war horse," came several voices. All looked, and sure enough it was the famous mouse-colored horse, vastly recovered from his hard experience of last moon. The old man went on.

"Who knows that spider-legged pinto?"

"That is Big Pipe's best race horse. She beat me with it last time of big races," said the same oversized warrior with the boisterous laugh. Then the old man told them a story about a war party many winters back, in which a woman had been

present and of how the men had fought as never before, and that her presence acted as a sort of stimulant and encouragement. Her medicine had been good. "Then, besides," continued the speaker, "those two horses are powerful medicine themselves. Who knows but what having her along might prove great medicine this time?"

"But what about the sacred number?" asked one pious youth.

"Pray to your good gods to forgive us," answered the counselor. Wagging of heads and whispering followed, after which it was settled that she should be allowed to stay.

"But she will have to stand all the hardships like the rest," said the big one with the laugh.

"She will be ready," said the counselor.

"And she will have to herd horses at night when her turn comes," said another.

"That she will," was the reply from the old man. He was smiling.

"And she will have to stand picket as a regular warrior with no complaint," came from still another.

"She knows the rules," came the reply.

"Well, let's get into the timber for some rest," ordered the chief.

And so it happened that a woman was accepted in a war party with this band of Pikuni.

The horses were close herded by the river. Pickets were posted on the high points surrounding the post, while the others prepared a little food and proceeded to stretch out for rest. When the sun had set and the afterglow had deepened past the colors of a mourning dove, the party was on its way once more. Singing Moon had dressed her hair as Middle Rider wore his, a thing unheard of among women: parted on the side, a big puff over the brow, with a tiny braid over the left ear. Two big braids from over her ears hung down on her chest, and a pronounced scalp lock was flying loose from the crown. Her costume was that of the others, except that she wore a decorated war shirt. What she had done with her gown, no one knew nor asked. Many an admiring glance was cast her direction. She, meantime, had opportunity in which to study briefly the countenances of her companions and found that the festive paint of the evening before had not been very carefully wiped off. Many of

these boys presented very dirty faces—some of the very ones who thought they had serenaded her. It struck her as funny, but she was in no mood for the least social friendliness with any of them. In fact, she addressed all of her speeches, and they were very few, to the chieftain and the counselor.

Next day they again rested in deep timber. Her time for reflection brought to notice one rather disturbing element. That big, coarse fellow of the rough guffaw was the one whom she had outraced on the spider-legged pinto, and he was the identical man whose attentions she had been obliged to resent at the great summer feast. Now he came to her again and assumed the privilege of sitting in the shade of the timber beside her, attempting to draw her into conversation.

"Why do you not trade that race horse to me for both of those fast racers you see tied yonder?" he asked by way of an opening. She eyed him narrowly, not without fear.

"I am not here to trade horses. The Spiderlegs is not mine in the first place," she replied. He moved a bit nearer.

"I have many horses, more than some chiefs. Some day I shall be a great chief, for I am brave and my medicine is good. I fear nothing." His tone was most confidential and she found herself thinking of the quiet modesty of her father. Could such a boastful one ever be a chieftain in the same sense as her father? While her customary caustic tongue sought release, she was really too frightened to know exactly what to say. This was not like the protective environment of the camp. This was a war trail.

Just then the young leader, Black-bush-three, appeared at a little distance. The thought struck him that this might be a planned affair. Were those two lovers? Eying them a moment, he read plainly that Singing Moon was in reality repulsing this huge Braggadocio. The young chief was aware of that man's violent remarks after the afore-mentioned horse race, and so quickly determined to take matters in his own hands. He strode boldly toward them. The boastful one followed the gaze of the girl and thus turned to face the approaching chieftain. In a quiet voice of stone, the latter addressed the burly one:

"On the war trail no man is allowed to associate with a woman at all. He must not even speak to this one as if she were a woman. Singing Moon is no friend of yours, as you see. You annoy her. Besides, she is with this party as a warrior and asks nothing more. You were the one who complained most loudly at her being here. Now leave her."

"Is she a friend of *yours?* Is she your woman that you manage her in this way?" Then the uncontrolled, nervous laugh broke forth again. The young chief dropped his hand to his knife and grew rigid.

"Better let him go this time," said another quiet voice. All turned to see the old counselor, Tra-kan-to, who had been sitting hard by and thus witnessed the whole affair.

Four nights of travel placed the little war party in the very heart of the Shoshone country, where it became necessary to double all precautions and move much more slowly. Some of the group guarded horses in the daytime, while others made scouting tours. Then on the fifth day they traveled in broad daylight, having reached a deep canyon, where they maintained

two warriors on each high bank as a walking lookout point.

Came Singing Moon's turn to climb the rugged slope to the summit and scramble along the rim as best she could. Part of the time she was on the very crest and then again somewhat below, yet always observing the great sweep of country beyond. It was a bleak land of baked gumbo soil, covered sparsely with sage and greasewood. The girl could not help saying to herself as she saw the deep tracks of buffalo in the hard gumbo:

"What a slick, difficult land this would be to cross after a long rain! Those buffalo had traveled that rim just after such a rain, probably, last spring."

During this soliloquy she was required to get right on the top, and in so doing she discovered a great cloud of dust a long distance toward the mountains. As she studied it she could make out from time to time black objects at the base of the dust. Some of the objects proved to be men riding madly! Instantly she gave a short yelp like a coyote pup and waved her arms over her head. Then she took several turns in a short circle, which sign indicated that she had sighted

some of the enemy. Like a flash the young chief was off his horse and had worked his way up the ugly cliff. Together they studied the dust cloud and the lay of the land, both considerably excited. Then they rushed pell-mell to the bottom, gave a few directions, and the whole party wheeled about, on the trot.

"They are surrounding buffalo," explained the chief, "and if we hurry we can go up that side canyon from this one, and I believe it will lead us far into the land where the hunters are. Perhaps we can surprise them at their butchering." The whole group became so excited that the old man had to command them to less talk. Reaching the side canyon, a mere crack in the earth much less formidable than the one they had been following, they turned to the right, took a single-file formation, and hastened as much as the trail would allow. They had covered quite some distance when the old man held up a finger for a halt and silence. He bent a stiff ear into the breeze, then jumped from his horse, ran to the edge of the draw, and peered over. By now the whole party was aware of a deep vibrating rumble, more noticeable since they were below

the surface of the surrounding country. Turning about with wild eyes, the old man yelled:

"We must get out of here! They have driven the herd this way and cannot make their surround, since there are too many. They will be pouring over this very bank in a minute!" Instantly the whole party grabbed their sacred bundles and weapons, the older ones tying on their war bonnets. The extra horses were turned loose and headed in a mad race, with yells and slaps back down the draw. Then the party forced their mounts up over the bank on the mesa in plain sight.

"Follow us!" yelled the two leaders as they quirted their horses over the flat at right angles from the oncoming herd, which was so close now that the clacking of hoofs and horns was added to the roar. Good fortune was with the Pikuni, for it was only the margin of the herd that was headed for their erstwhile hiding place. The leaders of the war party ran their horses at high speed in the opposite direction to the running cattle, taking advantage of the dust in hopes that they could reach the last stragglers where the hunters would be slowing up to start

the butchering. Finding that the herd was about past, the Pikuni wheeled into a troop front and charged right among the enemy hunters. Wildest excitement prevailed! Some of the Shoshones had time to mount and quirt their way toward safety, while others dropped behind the buffalo carcasses, and still others were shot down at once. On raced the beplumed Pikuni, Singing Moon wearing the bonnet of Middle Rider. They were like sweeping hawks as their ponies skimmed low to the ground, their bonnets snapping and cracking in the wind. What had been intended as a beef butchering, now turned into a battleground, for knives and stone hammers came into play where arrows had not completed the job! The air was rent with yells of more than one sort. The ancient law of Indian warfare is to keep moving at the greatest possible speed. At best, it was an uneven battle, for the hunters were taken wholly by surprise and had not come out properly armed for war.

At the start the girl had been fifth in line. Knowing safety of even the meagerest sort lay in perpetual speed, she soon found herself carried to the lead. She was not sure this was where she

wanted to be at all! Instantly she was filled with fear at her position, especially so since she was armed with a long "coup stick" instead of a spear. It would have been useless for her to use a bow, since she had no training in that line at all. Now a coup stick is a long staff on which a feather banner can be carried, or else it is decorated with some fox tails, wolf tails, and a few little bunches of feathers. The particular one she was carrying had been a ceremonial implement owned by the dead warrior whom she was avenging and was decorated with fox tails at the end only. She had heard her father tell how the highest honor a warrior could attain was to unseat an enemy with a coup stick without killing him and escape unhurt one's self. If one could secure some trophy at the same time the honor was even greater. Meanwhile, to the man unseated in this fashion there could be no greater humiliation! The girl proposed to make this attempt.

Seeing a very big, powerful Shoshone warrior riding a fine strawberry roan hunting horse, she headed the fleet little pinto in his direction, at the same time giving him a low word under her

breath. The horse responded instantly; he laid back his ears and took on such speed that inch by inch he drew toward the racing roan, whose rider was throwing occasional glances back at his pursuer. Had the poor man realized it was a woman tearing so madly after him, he might have died then and there! All he saw was a small horse carrying a boyish warrior armed with what he thought to be a spear, which instrument was carried in the right arm like the ancient pikes of heraldry days. Their course led from smooth ground into a heavy growth of sage, which slowed down the speed of both horses, since the mounts were having to dodge about in a choppy fashion. Just as the pinto drew alongside the roan, the big Shoshone, who had lost all his weapons except quirt in his hasty retreat, swung an arm in a wide arc, striving to break the aim of his enemy. He now perceived the weapon of his antagonist to be a coup stick, and, unfortunately for him, at the same instant the roan jumped a wide sagebush. This caused him to lose his balance, and the blunt staff crashed into his ribs. The girl was positive it had broken bones, for she could feel the crushing clear through her weapon.

Off went the Shoshone, and, to add further to his predicament, one hind hoof of his mount clipped his forehead just as he hit the ground, opening a scalp wound. The pinto could not be stopped at once; so he was ahead of the roan in a moment more, which latter animal, finding himself riderless and being at the disadvantage of dragging a long jaw rope, stopped, ears erect to face the girl.

Naturally the roan was her animal. She gathered up the lead rope, tied a hackamore halter (special kind of halter for saddle horses) on its head, and trotted leisurely back to the fallen enemy. Dismounting, she laid her hand on the hilt of her knife. A shudder of fear ran through her! She really had never even been present when a scalp was taken; to wind her fingers into the hair of this man and skin off a portion of his scalp, then hang the dripping trophy on her bridle rein seemed unthinkable for her. Besides look! the man yet breathed. He might come to consciousness any second!

Instantly she stripped off his belt which carried the scabbard and a good steel knife made from a file, together with the flint-and-steel

pouch, unloosed his moccasins, and with these trophies mounted the pinto. She gathered the coil of the roan's hackamore and started away. Just as she was leaving, her enemy half sat up and turned unseeingly toward her. Good! he was alive but unconscious and his people would find him. She had gained the highest honor and a horse of no mean value!

Working the animals into a lope, she was soon among her own tribesmen, who had completed their horrible business as far as was safe and were now gathering in preparation for making their escape. Two of their number had fallen, and there was no time for burial or carrying the bodies away, since it was a certain fact that the Shoshone camp was not far distant, and those hunters who had escaped would soon be back with a big party of avengers. Singing Moon noted that there were many bloody knots of hair tied on spears or bridle reins in their party and several had acquired hunting horses like herself. There was little time for comparisons, and all seemed wild with excitement. Black-bush-three was calling:

'Come, you owls! Ride! We must fly to save

ourselves!" With which speech he and the old counselor wheeled about and tore for the gulch up which they had come. Finding that some of the buffalo were corralled in the upper end, they were shut off from escape for the moment. Crippled buffalo were crowded into this narrow place. So the warriors were forced to enter the draw somewhat below where they had started their loose horses back just previous to the attack. Once in the narrow trail, the recently captured mounts were driven ahead at break-neck speed over the roughest possible trail, where ordinarily one would travel with care.

Arriving at the larger canyon, the party swept around the base of the cliff to the right into an open basin. The girl was so elated over her success that she could not refrain from letting the pinto out, whereat she drove the Shoshone hunters like a demon, leaving her kinsmen far to the rear. Many of their horses were excellent, but how they did envy her that spider-legged, painted, square-tailed race horse!

They saw not far distant the little band of their own extras, grazing on a slope. Into this band she drove the Shoshone horses and then

cornered them against the cliff. Her friends were there in a twinkling. As they knew exactly what she intended doing, they all set to the same business. Their admiration for this girl was growing every moment! The party took fresh mounts, while the heads of the hunting horses were roped closely to the heads of the sweating animals just exchanged, this to prevent the Shoshone horses from giving trouble by attempting to break back into their own country. This completed, equipment and surcingles tightened, away they flew on the homeward trail, again the band of haltered animals ahead. Singing Moon was now mounted on the famous mouse-colored war horse, also noted for his speed. Since she was a light burden, he, almost recovered from his last war, made no effort whatever carrying the girl up hill or down. Frequent glances were cast on the back trail and along the canyon walls, but no enemy appeared. Night found them many miles from the scene of their bloody encounter.

Two days later, hungry, weary to a condition of pain, they sighted the fires of their own village. Now they rode slowly, for this triumph was to

be done to a brown! They would attempt the age-old trick of outscouting their own pickets and herdsboys. They would send one of their members into his own home, secure all the war finery and paint he could muster, return to their hiding place, and await the dawn for their entry.

At the merest hint of morning light they were all astir, performing the most elaborate toilets possible under the circumstances. Of course, the one who had stolen into his own lodge had promised not to reveal their presence in the vicinity. It was common knowledge that actual secrecy was usually too great and the opportunity too thrilling to let pass. So when the avalanche-like charge into their village was made, most of the fright and commotion was feigned, since Indian tongues had wagged throughout the village with almost incredible speed and thoroughness.

Great was the turmoil when this party swept among the tepees and rode full length of the village at deadly speed. Dogs, babies, pack horses, and all other life that had not been informed of the coming event scattered in all directions, wildly seeking cover. From the first the village had been in continual speculation; soon

THE BIG SHOSHONE, WHO HAD LOST ALL HIS WEAPONS EXCEPT QUIRT IN HIS HASTY RETREAT, SWUNG AN ARM IN A WILD ARC, STRIVING TO BREAK THE AIM OF HIS ENEMY

as it was broadcasted that Singing Moon had accompanied the party the camp was given over to feverish gossip. While she left no word and none was brought back as to her whereabouts, the absence of the two noted horses and a certain dead man's war bonnet had told a transparent story.

Few horses have ever been admired more than the mouse-colored one, the sleek little pinto, and the strawberry roan! Few war journeys have ever received the attention and repetition that this one gained! And last, but far from least, few women ever found themselves in prominence, so deeply respected, and so ardently sought as did Singing Moon after her daring journey!

CHAPTER XIII

He Counted Coup on a Rabbit

STORMS, seasons, stampedes, starvation, birth, sickness, and death attended their programme of life, all in the warp and woof of their meager existence—all of this was expected.

But there came a day in the late summer when an event turned the camp wrong side out!

Berry season was at hand, a jolly, festive time for the women. The fruit was especially plentiful throughout the whole valley where they happened to be camped this particular year. The term "berries" is really a sacred term and embraces several sorts of fruits aside from what we know as berries. For example, Plains Indians even included chokecherries, buffalo currants, hawthorne apples, and sometimes rose hips along with real berries, especially when it comes to gathering fruit for that most delicious food, pemmican. Parties scattered in various directions.

The scouts had assured them that the country was quite clear of enemies. The little chief had been left with his tall, slim old granddaddy—who idolized the child!—and the two had waved a happy adieu to the groups as they rode past on their horses. Deep parfleche baskets were swung across the withers of the horses, one at each knee of the riders.

Many of the men left early in the morning under guidance of the old chief on an extensive scouting trip over in another valley. It would soon be time to select another permanent camp site for winter.

Most of the morning passed along famously for the little chief. Little games were played, followed a glorious swim in the river, and then, in the shade of a huge cottonwood, came stories about "Old Man," "Cold Maker," "the Bear Men," "the Red-winged Things," etc.

"Tell me the story about the Red-winged Things again," pleaded the little boy. "That is the best of all." So the old grandfather repeated the story. Here it is:

"Once a beetle who appeared black from the outside discovered when he was flying that the

wings inside the shell covers were red. He used these pretty wings merely for flight. When they were once set in motion he always looked much larger than he really was, and in fact so huge did he appear that many of the smaller things grew afraid of him.

"Having once learned to frighten the lesser insects, the beetle became a great bully in the grass world.

"Now one day while flying over a marshland, the beetle met a great sand-hill crane. Forgetting his actual size, the beetle attempted to terrify the crane, who stood very erect and haughty. Finally, while encircling the crane's head, the beetle struck the bird in the forehead and thus fell to the ground. He no sooner dropped into the grass than the crane gobbled him down his throat.

"However, where the red wings of the beetle struck the forehead of the crane, you will find to this day a great red mark upon which no feathers grow at all.

"Nowadays all the other little things in the grass keep out of sight where the crane walks past, but they always say:

"'Look there! See that awful, long bird with the bright spot above its bill? That is the bird that ate up the father of all the red-winged beetles—the one that was such a bully!' "

After the stories they took a long walk in the village, visiting many old people and seeing a whole host of things being made. As the child grew weary—the old grandfather had been so this long time—something more interesting reached their ears. It was very familiar to the old man. It rumbled beneath, it rose and fell, it soared above, but withal was rather mild and innocent. Yes; that's what it was, a gambling song with rattles accompanying. Adults would have suspected the old man of knowing all the time exactly what he heard, but the child was greatly interested when the old man suggested that they find the lodge where the game was being played. It would not hurt to look on a few moments. Soon they had traced the unmistakable sounds to a very large tepee bearing an unusual scheme of decoration—a secret society lodge.

Over the door was a shield bearing a drawing in which a buffalo was in the act of attacking a

hunter who was on foot, while on either side of the door a circle had been painted in blue and yellow. From the centers of the circles were suspended tails of buffalo. The smoke flaps, or ears, up above the lacing pins, were rather larger than those of the ordinary lodge and were covered with tiny stars in red. From the very points of each of the ears two little clusters of buffalo hoofs (merely the toes) were suspended in such a fashion as to keep up a perpetual mystic clatter as they rattled in the wind. Buffalo tails were again tied to the distal ends of the lodge-poles as they protruded high above the whole structure. One could not help noticing this lodge above all others as he neared the village.

They entered. One of those interims ruled by fun and mirth was on. The collection of ancestors attempted to tease their tall old friend about his tardiness. About a century ago all of them had been robust, hardy warriors who had dared the Southlands for Spanish horses. Now their value in military affairs was mainly negligible, but their advice and assistance in council was golden.

Two rows of old men seated or kneeling on the ground faced each other. Each employed a par-

fleche rattle in his right hand. In the center were old but highly decorated moccasins, never mates, while here and there were good-looking pebbles of various colors and about the size of a meadowlark's egg. Meantime, one of the players sat with his hands behind him, and, were it known, he would have small carved bones, white as ivory, in his closed palms. The game proved to be more of a guessing game, as the little trinkets and materials were shuffled about in one moccasin and then in another. The song seemed to have no purpose other than to distract the mass of players while the dealer worked wonders with the dice. It was not long before the tall newcomer found a place in the line and instantly became a thoughtful mummy. His grandchild leaned on his shoulder, fascinated with the fun of it and the jokes that were perpetrated during the lulls. Of course, the child had to be told that he was too young to play now, but that some day they would show him. Being an obedient little thing, he desisted and took a seat to the rear. In a short while, however, even the game ceased to attract; so he wandered outside.

And must it be told? The sun had set ere the

old grandfather awoke! The realization that he had been charged with a special duty that day was so sudden and almost rude that a mild panic seized him.

Bands of horsewomen had been drifting merrily into camp for some time. The loads of berries were deposited at the doorways, horses unsaddled and liberated. Again the great camp vibrated to the thousand and one sounds of domesticity. Twinkling little fires flecked the village, and the haze of the wood smoke lent coöperation to the dusk. The outlines of things were softened. Singing Moon burst into the lodge where the old fellows had allowed absorption to mature a day for them and demanded rather impatiently:

"Where is Sun Pipe?" The grandfather turned a dazed eye on her.

"Oh, yes, I know," said he at last. "Just so! He was here only a moment back. I'll go get him." Winding his robe about his hips with one hand and using his cane with the other, he followed the girl from the tepee. Goes-before was now calling the child's name from her own lodge. Finally she called in that positive tone

which all children recognize. At the first note of this tone they are wont to drop their playthings and fly. No results. Then the calling took on a slightly worried, pleading tone; all to no avail. Other people, hearing, commenced to look about casually, until a thorough search among the little folks and their homes resulted in the announcement that the little chief was not in the village at all. This was a signal for real alarm!

At this moment the riders who had accompanied Big Pipe into the next valley began arriving, and at last the chief himself. He was made acquainted with existing circumstances before he had ridden twenty paces into the camp. Though he shared his wife's discomfort, he retained an air of reassurance. A search was instituted into the hills throughout the pony herds. Every herdsboy was interviewed, every picket cross-questioned. The searching parties commenced riding in small circles about the village, gradually increasing the circumferences until they were far out in the hills, even out of sight of the camp. The warm summer evening passed with no relief from their fears.

Once more every woman in camp searched

the beds, thinking Sun Pipe had fallen asleep somewhere, or possibly was ill. Granny brought the information that she had seen the child at his old tricks, trying to count coup on a cottontail with a long willow wand; that is, he had been seen chasing a half-grown rabbit in a dusty trail past her lodge toward the river. Burning embers were carried out along this trail, and the little moccasin tracks were found to run parallel with those of a rabbit and at last to disappear at a badger hole in the deep sage. This was in some lowlands of a bend in the river. Opposite the searchers, the river bank rose high and precipitous. Next to the badger hole lay the willow wand. Not one sign of the boy or his clothing was to be found. And apparently no tracks or traces of any kind remained. The astute old chief was doing all in his power to keep his wife calm, but now she broke forth in loud lamentations. Her grief, while more obvious, was not more sincere nor touching than that of her husband. Finally bands of riders left for the hills to ride the long night through if necessary, for the boy must be found. The mother and Singing Moon retired to their tepee.

Oh, the lot of womankind throughout history! Ever has it been to wait, wait, wait! How much easier it is to be a player rather than a spectator in great games of life! The night wore on, as anxious nights do. Toward morning searching parties commenced to appear. Their silence was a telltale message. Many came in merely to get a bite, change horses, and start out again. Queer Person, who was always a silent spectator of things, sought out his childhood companion, the Twisted One, and together they crossed the river ford on foot and searched the bad lands and buttes that lay toward the west. Not a few medicine men launched their ceremonials in the cause. People spoke to strange gods and guardian spirits that had not been invoked this long time. Medicine bundles so old that they were mere shreds were untied and the contents displayed before lowly altars in the secrecy of medicine lodges. It was most plain that both the child and his family were dear to the hearts of the entire village!

Dawn came and the sun appeared. That sun always comes back, "He is dead, dead, dead," wailed the distraught mother. "I know it." But

Singing Moon said otherwise. Had she not learned from Granny the trick of rendering her mind blank in the presence of the last stars of the morning or the first ones of the evening, calling to the spirits for a word of truth? Her prayers had told her that the boy yet lived. To the girl's entreaties for patience and control on her mother's part, the unhappy woman only wailed afresh.

"Oh, what spirits would talk to one so young as you?" she had replied impatiently. "How much have you lived? How much do you know about sorrow and loss? Go away; you know not what you say!" This broke the girl herself, temporarily, and she sought Granny for comfort, as she had done these many winters.

No word of success having come by noon, the mother was found disfiguring herself according to an age-old custom. She cut off one of her heavy braids of hair and destroyed it. Next she blackened her face with charcoal, and to the utter alarm of her daughter slashed her arms with a knife in several places. Lastly, donning her ugliest butchering gown, she left the lodge, mounted a near-by prominence and gave herself

up to the wildest weeping and chanting. She censured herself for having ever left the child that day at all, he the very pride and consolation of the chief, the very child that was destined to be chief of the band! She prayed for death. Singing Moon and others watched her closely to prevent any possible attempts at suicide.

Just before sunset Granny slipped over to the big lodge. Singing Moon had prepared food for both parents and had utterly failed in her endeavors to tempt them to eat. If the girl was on the hill with her mother, the old woman might steal a word with the chief alone. Big Pipe sat before a dead fire, with his equally dead pipe. He stared into the ashes. This sight brought the old woman to the verge of tears herself. She mustered all her reserve and used the license of age.

"Do you want to find that child?" asked Granny in a tone made more harsh than she had intended in her effort to keep her voice steady.

"Why, yes, Granny," came the reply in a deep controlled voice, a surprised look in his eyes. "That is just what we have been trying to do for two days."

"Well, why don't you do something?" rasped Granny.

"What more could we do, Granny? We have had parties out day and night on foot and horseback. They come and go no matter how weary they may be." The old man was thinking how childish Granny had become of late. He would be patient with her, for she would not be staying long.

"Well, I have something to tell you that may help." And with this she unfolded a plan, hoping with all her powers of prayer that he would heed her word. Once back in her own lodge, she kept a sharp watch over the chief's home.

None knew better than Granny that the loss of children was most common among her kind. Child mortality was so great that it was a wonder, at times, so beset were they with dangers, that any reached maturity at all. Grief for lost ones was deep, sincere, racking, spontaneous, and passing.

CHAPTER XIV

The Great Secret, Four Winters Old

Little thought and almost no attention was granted Queer Person during all this excitement. To the casual observer the placid lake of his life had the same surface. He had never understood completely why he had been an outcast. Until of late he had not questioned it; merely accepted. Recent happenings had caused his forced silence to become real suffering. The human owl of him was watching, hearing, knowing, understanding more each day, yet he said nothing. The mightiest thing in the world he had put down—himself! Could he continue to do so? Reading him like a book, the sagacious eye of old Granny witnessed certain indications of a troubled deep. Her mute was becoming a man; her "idiot" was blossoming into a sage; her son was becoming a warrior. Would she be able to control him through the necessary steps of the

great drama that dwelt unplayed in her mind? Would he do his part to a successful end? She turned to her gods.

He sat with idle hands, a rare pose for him. The fringed eyes failed to conceal the caldron of his thoughts. The pupils dilated; his was an obsidian gaze flecked with topaz! There was that in his eye which caused Granny to cringe a bit. Had she misjudged and thus held him in control too long? Had the period been too tense and thus ruined his fine stamina? Now the eyes were mere slits; he half rose on tight muscles, only to sink back with a groan. He was only partly aware of her presence. Through wide, spacious nostrils, thin and sensitive, came the hot, choppy, unrhythmic breath. Little hissing sounds exuded from between his teeth. His entire mien spelled hate, for no person, for no people, but for his lot in life. Fear now seized Granny as almost never before in her long life. Now he turned on her violently:

"I tell you I am sick of silence! I hate it! I'm sick of solitude! Sick of being despised! My spirit fights for action!" She tremblingly held out a hand, attempting to stay him by a gentle word

of caution, of consolation. "Do not speak to me, old hag! I know what you are about to say, I have heard it a thousand, thousand times, until now I tell you I have heard for the last time. Why have I this body?" and here he beat his chest after the manner of primitive peoples. "Look at these two strong hands. Are they to rot because you want silence, caution, secrecy, and all for a promise of some powerful medicine that awaits me? I tell you I can't keep this silence any longer!" And with this he sprang to his feet, drawing himself to his full height with all the muscles in his splendid body tense and knotted.

Was this brave, dominant man the little Queer Person she had snatched from the jaws of cruel winter and raised with watchful, loving care? In spite of fears, she sensed a decided pride in him. Short as the time was in which she might still save the day and accomplish her great end, and born actress that she was, her powers nearly failed. Then, as if in answer to her most fervent prayers, a strange elixir surged up through her being and she determined to play her last medicine into this lifelong endeavor. Slowly and

painfully she reached her feet and leaned on her staff. Taking one step toward him, she raised her face slowly. Her back was nearer straight than for many a day. The ring on his metallic tones was yet in her ears, the curl of his lip yet lingered.

Her own voice took on a cutting edge as she snarled in deepest bitterness:

"Yours are cruel words, selfish words of haste, man! They will fly back at you from the gods with painful echoes! They will make you have pain, do you hear the old hag? I am only a witch, am I? Who are you to dare turn on me when I am the one reason for your living? If the old hag had not fed you and warmed you, magpies and coyotes would have scattered your bones in yonder grass. It is my poor arms that have slaved for you, it was my crooked back that carried you over the wide ranges, it was my courage that braved evil spirits when the people thought you a possessed idiot, and the same courage saved your body from dogs, bad men, sickness, and storms. All this I did to have you spurn me now as a dog does a porcupine!

"When you found you could hear, who was wise and trained you to what you are? The old

hag wants to know if all the wisdom and medicine used through these many winters to make a warrior of you has been washed away as rain washes mud from rocks? Could all this be gone in a twinkling because a youth grows hot in his head and strains at the very leashes that have saved him?" She paused for breath.

He had seen his Granny in many moods, but never like this. Gradually his own explosive anger cooled. His muscles relaxed and a pallor crept over his smooth face and neck. He was cut, stabbed in the centers of his soul. Tears came to his eyes and he trembled. What had he done? As though reading his very thoughts she started afresh, waving her scrawny arms aloft. In spite of all his signs of abject regret, she would not spare him now. If he was to be taught to the fullness of the great medicine, he must be made to suffer. If he was to be saved from himself and given to the medicine of her dreams, he must be carried over this period of storm and doubt. Her powers must rule!

"Who are you? Do you know? No one does. You stand alone without me. There are none about you with courage nor love for you but the

old hag. To blurt out the truth about your hearing and speaking now would cause suspicious minds to hate you for deceit and treachery. And yet you would do this because the old woman who plucked you from the jaws of winter, not once, but many times, now bids you be patient and faithful a little longer! In boyish haste and anger you would cast aside my patience, prayers, medicine, strength, and all that I can see for you in the many, many winters to come. The old hag has been good enough until now, but, with no thought but yourself, you would now throw away the protection of that old hag!"

"Stop! Stop, I tell you!" he cried in anguish. "I cannot stand this!" But she had stopped more than he realized. Truth is, she had expended her last ounce of energy and was swaying, unseeingly, to and fro. Just as she was sinking to the ground his young arms caught her gently and laid her unconscious form on the couch of robes, the very robes tanned and prepared by the labor of these hooked and gnarled old hands. How frail she was! almost a feather. He had not realized before now that she was so near the end of the long trail. She opened her eyes and a wan smile

crept across the parchmentlike features. One rough old hand reached up to his face. In an instant he buried his face on the withered breast. Her voice was very low now. All the harshness was melted away; only tenderness remained.

"I knew it would come," she said, "the spirits told me long ago."

"Are you—are you going to *die?*" his broken voice choked out.

"No, Son, not just yet. I am only weak and worn. My old bones are near the end, but this is not it. What the spirits told me was this: my son would turn into a fighting man suddenly, and there would be a great struggle. I had not thought of it this way, though. Granny was told by the stars many winters back that her son had the blood of chieftains in his veins, and that it would take great medicine to cause him to use all the powers that lie sleeping in his spirit. I see my son is now a warrior with the hot courage of a real fighter. When did it come, Son?" Here he raised his head and looked long into the dim, old eyes. His voice was deep and controlled again.

"I cannot say, Granny. For many suns I have

lived outside myself. It comes worse when the young warriors serenade the lodges. I hate those dancers and singers!" Here he clenched his jaws firmly. She was stronger now and watched him keenly. Then ever so cautiously she asked:

"Does my son wish to do great things at last? And is it because a girl's eyes have lighted the fires in his heart?" His own eyes wavered from her sharp gaze, sought the distant landscape through the arched doorway, then dropped groundward. Thus he sat breathing deeply. Finally, without looking at her, he spoke.

"Granny, my heart is the bluest of the village I am the most sorrowful man of the whole camp."

"Is it Singing Moon?" He nodded yes, then becoming animated by the very desolateness of his position he poured it all out to his old benefactress.

"It is all black in the days to come. She could not love one such as me; no, never. I am merely a deaf person to her. There is no cure for my grief. I love her as the grass loves water, as the flowers love sunlight, as the moth loves the moonlight! There is no happiness without her for Queer Person. Yet he may not have her

love. All honor comes down the war trail and no war party would have me. Only warriors are loved."

"In the long-ago days our men sometimes went alone," suggested Granny by way of testing his courage. Quickly he stared into her face again. He was disposed to laugh, but only at the thought of himself as a war party! His lack of faith in himself at this moment was so like the same misgiving of a certain other young heart when being persuaded to go to war on a similar occasion. The old woman's love for these two young souls mounted higher right now than ever before. Then she put another question to him:

"Have you loved long enough to be sure it is not the whim of a mere boy?"

"How could you ask that?" he queried. "To see her struggling with her grieving parents, suffering beyond words herself all the time, and doing all this hard work is a deep pain to me. I long to help her, to comfort her. Your Queer Person knows but one way to help her, and that would be to love her as long as the hills last."

"Then she does not know of your love?"

"Not one bit! How could I, a poor man with only three old horses and known as a deaf person by most of her friends and as an idiot by all the others in the camp, ever hope to have the love of the chieftain's daughter?" His despair was truly racking.

"Your time has come, I believe, my son. But dare I ask you to be patient but a little longer? Dare I say to you again that if you will try perhaps a great voice will speak to us and find a way?" He gathered the poor old creature in his young arms again and replied in a voice that trembled:

"Forgive! forgive! forgive! I meant it not. Say on, speak words of wisdom and caution to me always, Granny. I am but a frail sort of warrior and shall be the poorest man in camp when thou art gone to the Shadow Land!" She partly sat up. There was a glint in those beady eyes once more.

"Lift the door flap higher so I can see the lodge of our chief. Has the sun gone yet? There, I am better. Now, Son, we must watch. I was over for a talk with Big Pipe just before you—

THE CHIEF CHANTED A VOW: "TO THE BRAVE WARRIOR WHO FINDS SUN PIPE, I OFFER MY DAUGHTER!"

we—before I told you it was your time, and I gave him some advice. Let us see if he has found my words good. If so, then the good gods have heard me. Then I see a war trail filled with honor ahead of my son, such as will make him a mighty voice among his people. It will bring him a glad heart." The would-be warrior was all aquiver with excitement. Together they watched as hunters from a blind.

"Hist! My medicine works!" said Granny, pointing, just as the colors were leaving the sky. Presently the chief stepped outside in his finest ceremonial garb of white buckskin, long fringes on sleeves, supplemented with wisps of hair from enemy victims, broad bands of quilled work over the shoulders and down the outer surfaces of the sleeves. Across the back of the shirt was a solid row of white weasel skins. The leggings were tight fitting, bearing bands of quilled embroidery on the outside. The fringes were so long that they were almost a nuisance. In his hand he carried the eagle fan that was said to have waved its way through a hundred famous councils. No bonnet adorned his head. Instead, he wore one upright black-and-white eagle plume

at the back. His hair was slicked down with oil.

With one graceful gesture he called a herdsboy, who in an amazingly short time returned with two of the chief's best war ponies.

Then it was that Singing Moon appeared in her gala-day attire. Her gown was of white antelope skin and possessed the clinging qualities of a velvet fabric, thus exhibiting the lithe young figure in her graceful stride. The gown was long, but the fringes were cut deeply, almost to the knees, while higher was the sparse fringe of "twin strings," which were arranged about the width of the hand apart, the strings being caught at their fastened ends with little quilled bands and then flowing almost to the ground. The sleeves were short, and across the front and back was a broad yoke of intricate, quilled design. Her hair was unadorned, for in the old days no woman would even consider wearing feathers except in rarest of occasions. Such an occasion was Singing Moon's war trail. The faces of these actors were exceedingly sorrowful.

The girl mounted the horse and followed her father without raising her glance to those who had gathered about them. They rode into the

heart of the village without a word. People thronged the dusk. A great fire was kindled in the arena. The appearance of their chief and his daughter at this moment was an indication of some rare ritual or ceremony. Perfect silence reigned. Then the chief chanted a vow:

"To the brave warrior who finds Sun Pipe, dead or alive, I offer my beloved daughter and forty head of our best horses!" This he repeated again and again, then rode the entire length and breadth of the village singing this strange avowal. The presence of his daughter was proof of her resignation to this publicly proclaimed oath. Be it known that they both realized the sacrifice made in such a decision.

What if some rascally scoundrel, even the most villainous character in the camp, were to prove successful? These two would still be bound by the oath. Singing Moon thought of Yellow Hand. When the old father first informed his daughter of the proposal made by Granny, the girl saw her father weep for the first time in her life. They talked over its many phases, and finally he determined not to do it. The daughter persuaded him that her happiness was as naught

compared with the possible chance of restoring the little chief.

"Besides, my father, according to the teachings of our people I have spoken with the early morning stars many times since the loss of Sun Pipe, and each time the reply comes that he is not dead." And the old chief had laid his hand on the head of his daughter with the tenderest regard, saying: "My daughter wishes to keep strength in my old heart. She is good, wise, and kind, like the beautiful girl from the East Wind who first brought us our sacred pipe stone." And so they had agreed to make this tremendous sacrifice, hoping for the favor of the good gods in it all. They chanted their way about the village.

When this procession of two came back to their own lodge Queer Person's heart sank. What chance would he have against all the many clever and tried young warriors in the village? He even lacked swift horses! His despondency was deep. But Granny, as usual, came forth with the most surprising advice and plans. What she proposed for him to do threw him in the seventh degree of elation one moment and parox-

ysms of alarm, doubt, and even fear the next. Said she:

"When your hearing came I had a dream that some day great things would enter your trail. Until that time I was consumed with pity for you, but ever since there have been proofs almost daily of great powers in your spirit. If I had any way of getting at it I believe I could prove you have the blood of chieftains in your veins. As soon as your hearing became developed and your talk power gained, you changed into a brave man. I have prepared for this day. Many things have I made in secret; many plans have I laid in silence. But it is true, I had not pictured this thing, the loss of the little chief. This much I missed; was not told. But I know as sure as the sun comes back each day that this is your great time for action. It is meant for you, and if you will but do exactly as I say happiness and success are yours. If you fail to follow my directions all our hearts will be blue stone."

And so they talked and planned in low voices all the night through, having little fear of detection, since the rest of the village was concerned with its own affairs.

There was a short time of quiet after the return of the chief and his daughter. The village was dazed by the extent of courage to which their beloved leader and his beautiful daughter had gone in this matter. She was sacrificed! Other men might do this with their families for given purposes, since it was common enough, but not Big Pipe! Suddenly the people awoke to the situation. Never had the youth of this camp been so inspired. Being exposed as a sacrifice seemed to place the girl on a higher pedestal, more unattainable than ever. The good and the evil were consumed with the same ambition now. This was a brave challenge to their own courage.

A few at a time, the dancers collected before the great white lodge of their chief. None entered, nor even dared so much as to disturb the door cloth for speech with the occupants. The door was locked! To lock the entrance of an Indian tepee one pulled the door cloth down tightly, and reaching out along the margins set up two sticks across it. Even the smoke flaps were closed. Society drums were brought, notable singers were invited, and gradually there started such a serenade as the people had seldom heard in all

the village history. Had Singing Moon the heart to look out, she would have seen a grander display of costly buckskin costumes with trailing fringes and gay eagle plume bonnets than had been on display in many a winter.

Warriors retold the stories of their lives in song, dance, and pantomime, a ceremonial known as "recounting coups." A thousand brave achievements were related in tones loud enough to be heard by the wolves away out in the hills. In fact, wolves did collect on the high points about the village and added their clarion to the volume of song arising from the timber along the river bottom. The second stage in the great serenade was to break into smaller groups and sing, dance, and recount coups before the lodges of other prominent men of their number, after which they all met at the chief's home again for one final ovation. It was the grand and noisy finale, indeed!

Just as they had collected for all this glorious ceremony, they now departed in small groups. Preparations for departure on the great drive for the recovery of the little chief were anything but colorful. They were hasty and selfish. This

was to be an individual affair. Men wanted to gain this masterful achievement without the company of their fellows. They went alone.

Dawn found the village practically emptied of the flower of the warrior bands! The herds were impoverished for lack of swift war ponies. Fraternity lodges, where slept numbers of the young braves, were empty, dead, the beds of soft buffalo robes untouched that night.

There was not an eligible young man to be found!

And this night's revelry was the invention of the mind of an old woman, despised and feared by most of the very ones who sang and danced the loudest. As the first rays of the sun gilded the topmost leaves of the cottonwoods, this same old woman smiled a most unlovely and selfish smile to herself over her handiwork. Then she gave the tall youth sitting before her the last touches of instruction for his day.

"Queer Person, my son, my beloved idiot," said Granny with feeling, "this is your day. Your time has come. You have kept your secret four winters just for this very moment. You said you could not keep still any longer, that

your great voice craved being lifted up among the people that they might know you could command them. If you cannot remain silent any longer, then do not!" She reached for her tom-tom that she might chant a wee prayer for the success of her boy in this wonderful day.

CHAPTER XV

A Lover's White Robe

SINGING MOON'S spirit was running low; likewise her bodily strength. The horrors of a fireless tepee were having their effect. Her time was divided between bereaved parents, whom she futilely begged to partake of food. The mother, now very weak, was covered with a robe at night. Her father's pipe Singing Moon relighted a hundred times a day. As the live hearth fire annoyed him she cooked outside. Her speeches of encouragement to each were filled with hope and sincerity; the tone was pathos itself, but inspiring. Kindly neighbor women took her place at intervals.

With a heavy sigh the girl took up two parfleche buckets and started to the river. The trail led through the cottonwoods in that area reserved for the women, where they did their washing, took the children to bathe, and did much of

their work. As a rule, young girls did not go about on these duties of carrying wood and water alone, but were accompanied by older women, usually relatives, but on this morning Singing Moon made only half an effort to find Granny. The ragged lodge was empty. Anyhow, she little cared for custom on that day.

Suddenly her attention was arrested by the figure of a tall man wrapped in a white robe down the trail, standing at a little distance. This was not an uncommon sight, for young suitors not wishing to disclose their identity were wont to stand by this trail in hopes of an opportunity for conference with the objects of their love. But to see a young man standing there now when it was known that all other eligibles had left aroused her curiosity. No matter, he might not be in quest of her, anyhow; so she kept her course on past the figure. His head was covered with the white wrap, leaving but one eye exposed, as custom would have it. She was startled on the return trip to have the tall watcher step into the trail immediately in front of her, causing her to stop and set the buckets down. It was an unwelcome interruption to her right then, this

having some ambitious youth seek her favor. Black despair dominated her world. Lovers only intensified her misery.

But her eye chanced to light on the yellow and blue quillwork of this man's moccasins. Her woman's soul was touched at the sight of handiwork so beautiful. To draw her farther from the depth of absorption, she detected a slight deviation of pattern in this handsome footgear from that of her own people. From instep to point of the toe, slightly on the outside, ran a row of very short fringes and on each little fringe was a tiny shell. Surely those moccasins had never been worn before, and what wonderful work they were! The leggings were cut like those of her father, tight fitting with amazingly long fringes. Except for a quilled edging at the very bottom and the glorious fringes, they were quite undecorated. In color they were a pale tan, a tint secured only by the cleverest of smoking with some special kind of bark. She allowed her eyes to travel to his knees, where she found the white robe concealing the rest of him.

Could this man be from another tribe? Had he, in some mysterious manner, come to know

her as the chief's daughter and stolen in here on a day when the camp was practically unguarded except by older men? For the moment she wanted to fly. Then it occurred to her that perhaps this was some trick being played, for it was well known that the different secret societies of warriors kept courting costumes to be used on just such occasions, and all this man's finery might be one of their bits of deceptive art.

But the young fellow himself decided all her questions.

He removed the robe from his head and shoulders. She could hear the soft rustle of the finely tanned buck as he did so. Not until then did she dare to raise her eyes.

A ghost! He looked like Queer Person, and yet it could not be he. The only head ornament was one single white eagle "fluff," a perfect one! and it was fastened by a single strand to the side of his head. The hair was parted in the middle and slicked down over the ears in two heavy braids that lay on his chest, while the part itself was colored with vermilion. On the man's forehead was a broad band of blue. He wore narrow armbands of quilled parfleche. He had neither shirt

nor necklace. The face was serious and calm, but she thought one moment she detected a slight indication of pain in the eyes, and the next, ever so slight hint of mirth. The chin was square with a cleft, exactly like that of Queer Person.

"Are you the ghost of anybody I know?" she finally managed to breathe in the smallest of voices. For just the fraction of a second he returned her stare. The expression was so familiar that she clapped her hand over her mouth in alarm. Panic would have lent her wings! Then he spoke, and it was truly a ghostly voice! The same ghost that had spoken with Granny that night, deep, measured, a bit sedate and with somewhat of an accent.

"No, beautiful girl; I am no ghost"—and he touched her lightly with two fingers on the wrist by way of proof. "And more than that, I am somebody you see every day of your life. Some days it has meant pain to have you see me—as I was. I am your long-time friend, Queer Person." A certain confidence came to her, and she replied with almost perfect equanimity:

"But our Queer Person does not speak. He looks like you, indeed, but you cannot fool me

this way." The corners of his mouth twitched and then he grinned enough to flash his fine, strong white teeth. In that fleeting exposure she had time to glimpse a tiny defect in one of the front incisors; the least little corner was broken off. This she knew to be true of the Queer Person who made arrows in the shade of that raggedest of lodges so long. Her look narrowed and became glassy, arch. She trembled violently.

"How long have you been speaking?"

"At least four winters."

"And you have made us all feel confidence in you. You have deceived us? Then it was you who spoke to Granny at night and who sang ancient songs that only the oldest in the camp knew? You lied when I asked you about it."

"I did not lie. Queer Person does not lie at all. You asked me long ago if I ever saw or heard the ghosts that came to Granny. I told you I never did."

"But you have sat in my father's lodge and listened to councils with warriors when it was meant that none other should hear. Have you been a traitor? Are you really from another tribe and have you been a spy in our midst?" By now

her voice was so sharp that it dripped hate. She stood in that menacing attitude learned from Granny, arms akimbo. Truly this was a bad sign, most belligerent! It was his turn to gauge his voice down to a fine metallic edge. Never had he been accused of base perfidy. In fact, the present contingency had never entered his mind, so free from malice and deceit had his whole life been.

"You have known me since before we could both well remember. I have been fed and cared for by your people and by one who took me when all the others discarded me. You must know how and when I gained my hearing and speech before you call me snake. Shall I tell you?" He shortened the story, giving her just enough to carry his point, making it clear that it took some time in which to learn to know sounds and to manage his voice. Part of the time he resorted to his hands, right then, for with these he was far more fluent. She was not yet convinced.

"I still call you coyote, coward, and spy! Why should a man keep such a thing secret if he had not some treacherous purpose? He would be proud to let the birds, the beasts, the trees, the hills, know, let alone men. Why did you do it?"

No question she could have asked might have left him so empty of argument. He did not even try to answer, but asked her one himself.

"Do you believe so little in the wisdom of our own spies that an outcast could live in the midst of the village all his life and outwit them all? And if you really do feel I am a spy and traitor, can you not name instances in which I played false? Tell me one time of treachery, just for proof." Singing Moon felt her fortitude turning to water beside the dignity and presence of this new Queer Person.

"Who has taught you to talk with this proud manner as though you were making a speech in high council?" Her tone was merely interested now, although she was not ready to accept him at face value yet.

"I have studied and pondered over the things that I have heard on all sides; I have listened well when Granny has had great things to unfold. And, most of all, I have struggled against things the rest of you know not. My medicine is strong!" Shall we pardon him for boasting a little? He did it merely in the sense that another Indian might have counted coup. Having no war achievements,

he scarcely ever dared use the term coup. "More than that. Granny says I am not just a beggar, but that she believes the blood of chieftains is in my body. Grief and sorrow have been my companions and they have made me strong. I have seen the sneers of our people, have heard their curses; but I have *felt* their hate when they called me idiot. You have never called me idiot, nor have your parents, but my safety during these past few winters lay in playing the exact part the camp expected of me. That is why I have told no one. Granny knew a powerful medicine was to come out of being controlled. While you have never called me idiot, you have just now called me worse, you, who have known me all your life." His voice had sunken to a sort of moaning chant. "Only three men have ever called me friend: your father, Middle Rider, and the Twisted One. You and Goes-before have been kind. But, now, I guess it was of no use." The girl had half turned her back and was tracing a pattern in the sand with the toe of her moccasin.

"But if you are loyal to the people," she continued without facing him, "why are you here

in camp when the son of your chief may be starving in the hills?"

"Can't you see? What society of braves would have me? What war party would allow me on the trail with them? It is alone I must go, and in a direction such that I shall see none of my own people. You have never had to be afraid of your own people when a child; you have never had to shun them since you have been a woman. You do not understand this; you could not." The sound of his own eloquence suddenly made him self-conscious, but he dared not stop now, for there was another matter to be brought up. "Granny says my day has come, that I may tell all the world I can hear now. I do not care to tell much of the world. I did want to tell you." Strange how tall this new Queer Person seemed to her! And to see him proud, haughty, even angry, and now to find him clever in speech was all such a surprise! It was like meeting a totally strange warrior, especially when listening to his accent of speech. Once she had seen a messenger from another tribe who seemed this way. Mixed emotions were beginning to annoy her, and she sought to extricate herself.

"I have been to war. I have faced death among the enemy," she said, half to herself, and could have bitten her tongue off the instant she said it, for she suddenly realized anew how this point was paining him. But she must finish now. "I wish you had not told me of your hearing until after you have done great deeds and gained honor."

"It was my wish to go out to find Sun Pipe without telling anyone, but Granny's medicine is much stronger than mine, and she said not to do that way. I am telling you. I am going, and soon. But I wanted to be able to think that Singing Moon knows Queer Person can hear and speak as do other men. This I want in my thoughts all the time I shall be away. I knew if you realized the change, you would be more likely to have me in your thoughts, too. You do not think of Queer Person as a warrior, nor in the midst of brave deeds, now, but you are going to. I feel the war spirit big in me, and my medicine will stand quiet no longer. My trail will be the old-time war trail, alone and without horses. This is the way our great-grandfathers used to start when they sought honor. Knowing me as

you have, and being aware that our people have despised me as an idiot, you must tell me something else before I start." He paused, for she turned with a look of query and mild alarm.

"But if you go out to meet an enemy alone you will be killed. It will be slaughter, like that of our people when they find a buffalo in the deep snow. You are not trained. You might never come back to—to Granny again."

"My ears are so good now that only an enemy as wise as the wolf would get near me without being heard. But do I learn from your voice that you would worry a little when I am out alone on the war trail?" His white teeth flashed at her for an instant, again. "This is good," he said, chuckling mischievously. There was banter in his tone. "And knowing this, I can do wonderful things on the trail.

"Something more I must know: Would you keep to your vow if I am successful in finding the little chief? Would you forget that I have been known as an idiot?"

Her vow! That awful night! She could not yet believe the thing was upon her, and yet here it was. He had brought it up. Her breathing was

after the manner of one undergoing great pain. She looked at him to reassure herself. Something totally strange was happening to her. How weird! Her worries did not seem so heavy right this moment. She continued to trace the pattern with her moccasin toe. Finally she completed it with the other toe. Then she cast a hurried, modest glance about her, as though in search of something that ought to be near, not that she was in such distress perhaps, but mildly needy. Her tall companion knew these symptoms, for he had been studying people more closely than the erstwhile so-called idiot. He was well aware that the custom of his people allowed a girl who found herself beset by similar perils to use the "wish-of-the-flower" ceremony! This was especially true when she did not desire to pledge herself. In this case both the young people knew she could not pledge herself to anyone considering the light in which she had taken the vow one night before. And Queer Person knew also that if the girl did not wish to signify her willingness to accept an admirer's attentions she was at liberty to pick a dried-up last year's weed-top to hand him instead of some attractive bloom.

Singing Moon was looking about in the profusion of plant undergrowth among the cottonwoods, a slight play at the corners of her lips. She was provokingly slow in making her decision. This was a tense moment for the prospective warrior, and yet it must be admitted he was more hopeful than worried. He thought she might hasten a little bit, at least. And to his great delight she stepped off the trail and gathered several sprays of the yellow vetch with her agile, graceful hands. This flower is sacred to the Blackfeet people, partly because it represents the kind of season that means happiness. It was late for them to be in bloom, but near the mountains altitude postpones the season. At first she did not hand them to him, but stood with them pressed against her lips and nostrils, and he would not move one inch to get them, forcing her to do it all of her own volition. As she handed them to him he tried gently to enclose her hand in the grasp, too, but in a twinkling she had dodged. Clutching the handle of a parfleche bucket in each hand and partly running, she cast glances of alarm over her shoulder. Soon she was well on her way to the big lodge, and the tall

person scarcely realized what had happened. His eyes followed her to the door of her lodge; then they dropped to the flowers. Here he stood, a very handsome, distinguished young man, an Indian, right in plain sight with a few little yellow flowers in his great hand!

Could anyone have watched all this scene? What if other women had been near and heard all? It would be over the entire camp before the sun was at its high point. But apparently none had witnessed the episode, and so far he was safe. Anyhow, if Singing Moon failed to identify him at first, then the rest of the camp would certainly be in a greater quandary than she.

And this brought on an idea: why not try the camp out, right now? He must get over this being secretive about all his actions. So, thinking, he covered his head with the white robe again, stole into the timber and brush across the bathing beach, and followed the river bank to the upper end of the village. Once before he had made the length of that village unknown (had not Granny recited his advent into their midst a thousand times?), and at that time he had caused every member of the village to pay him some attention.

Many were absent to-day, but there were plenty for the experiment, and while the season and circumstances were not the same he was the same person making the journey. Winding the lover's white sheet into the smallest possible bundle, he boldly stepped into the camp street, head high, bare chest high, the breeze gently moving the soft eagle fluffy in the side of his black hair. The swish of his fringed leggings was a rich sound, wonderful to hear as he strode down the perilous avenue. People appeared at lodge entrances all the way, mostly women, of course, but there were enough men to make it interesting. Once he heard a young girl cry out in half voice:

"Oh! Mother, quick! Who is that? He must be almost a chief!" Then again:

"Look, some visitor to see the chief. How did he get here? Where is his horse?"

"Perhaps he has some word of the lost boy. Let us watch where he goes."

And watch they did. His wake was filled with curious watchers. But he went not to the big lodge. He headed straight for that raggedest of lodges, old Granny's, lifted the door cloth, and entered. A scrawny hand reached out and ad-

justed two sticks across. Some who stood nearest declare to this day that they heard stifled cackles from within. Others declared he was certainly another of Granny's ghosts, for there really could be no such person as the one they saw enter that raggedest of lodges!

And so gossip reigned!

CHAPTER XVI

What a Pitiful War Party!

It was a grand Queer Person that old Granny sent out on his mission of love that morning. But this brown likeness of the Great Maker, this child of the salt sage, this erstwhile blighted pedestrian of flats paved with alkali gumbo, was a wonder to behold when he returned! Lo! the cool hand of higher powers had been laid on the hot grieving places of his soul, causing a quiet confidence to settle down through his being. This Queer Person who returned to her lodge had washed himself of vagabondage—had shaken himself clear of the dust of waifhood! Here he stood ready to meet the world with a crisp freshness more potent since it was begot of strong heredity. There was a glint in those eyes, a set in those shoulders, a carriage of that head, a clean-cut angle under the chin, and, too, methinks, something that bespoke ghosts in his moccasins.

To the public Granny was having one of her mean days. She gave no satisfaction to either the covert inquiries or the bold ones. In fact, as the day passed she began repulsing the curious ones. As for Queer Person, there he sat under a tree, apparently the same arrow maker of dull countenance, unkempt hair, oblivious to much that was taking place about him. Granny was secretly glorying in his ability to act! Why not make the best of it for to-day and get all the fun possible? To-morrow he would be gone; there would be time enough for explanations then.

When village harpies accosted him as to the distinguished visitor who entered Granny's tepee he replied with his hands that he saw no such. They eyed him with suspicion; some deliberately laid siege, determined to spy on him until the secret, if any, would be out. From time to time the arrow maker found opportunities in which to cast veiled glances toward the door of the big lodge. He was positive he saw the door cloth pulled down the width of a finger. Once the door cloth was lifted and Singing Moon walked out boldly, looking neither to right nor left, ascended the hill to plead with her mother to accept food and

water, returned, only to enter without so much as a single glance in the direction of the raggedest lodge. He smiled again. Did she see him? Of course she did. Was he not himself an artist in seeing quite as much from the tail of his eye as other wild creatures?

Evening brought various parties of berry pickers home, many hunters, and a few of the warriors who had started on the search for the lost child. Horses had gone lame, or there were accidents, or some illness, perhaps a skirmish with an enemy. Grief for lost ones was so common that many people had become quite callous to the demonstrations, and, besides, the routine of life must continue!

There was a noticeable lack of young men in camp, which was causing a little wave of jealousy among the unmarried women. A few directed remarks of bitterness toward Singing Moon. This evening was like any other to the many. Not to Singing Moon herself. It was as nearly inverted from its usual character as anything could be. Her little brother was gone, her father was a frail person in the lodge, and, as for a mother, she might as well have been with-

out one. A lover whom she had known all her life —and was at the same moment a stranger in his new rôle had come to her. He had warmed her world into a rosy glow, only to announce that he was leaving on an almost unbelievably perilous journey. The fact that he was going largely for her was small comfort now.

There was no inclination on her part to eat, nor to meet friends, nor to work. An apathy seized her. When she did try to think at all she found her mind continually reverting to the experience of the morning. Mixed and unlabeled emotions arose at times, only to be subdued. She longed to fly to him and hold him from the awful dangers ahead.

What had happened in the morning was in the nature of a dream. It contained elements of the impossible and a thousand that were unexpected. How could it be that that almost stupid, dull arrow maker sitting yonder was the same individual she had met as a proud lover! Had her father not been present, she might have laughed. There was a host of questions she would like to ask him were she to live through that morning again. Since the flower episode he had ceased to

be her childhood playmate. He was more. His hold on her heart grew each moment until she was forced to pray for strength to keep from rushing over and begging him not to expose himself. Her fears must not soften his purpose now.

Approach him she could not! Just what her own secret status in the case was she could not define, it was all so unexpected and strange. This was for him to do. Then, too, there was the hourly danger that some man whom she could never love would return successfully with the little chief. If her mother were to die she felt herself half planning deliberately to follow her. Going to the door cloth, she lowered it, enough to find that dusk was gathering. Granny was using her tom-tom, which was an indication that she, too, was in a quandary and was seeking her occult allies for comfort. The girl wished she might call on the spirits with the same ease and confidence! Perhaps Granny was preparing to see Queer Person off on his lonely war trail.

Sure enough, there he was, headed down the trail to the river bend. He was off! Across his back was the panther-skin quiver given him by Middle Rider so long ago; attached to this were

a light robe and a sack, the shape of which denoted a bundle of trail moccasins. At his belt was a small coil of lariat and the usual knife which her father had given him. She suddenly slipped from the lodge into the gloom that she might watch him the better. There he was, going, with not so much as one backward look! And what a pitifully lonely war party be constituted! No pomp nor glorified garments, no yells nor whoops no friends nor horses, not even one soul to shout good-bye. But then she thought of Granny. Surely Granny had bid him good-bye and must be grieving now, for it was plain that every danger in the world might beset such a war party of one!

She sought Granny, and as she suspected found her a most desolate, heartbroken old creature. Together the two wept. The whole tangle was theirs, theirs alone as it stood at that moment.

"I know he'll come back, he must; but suppose he fails in some little way and the enemy medicine proves to have the greater power! Suppose something none of us has thought of at all should befall him! I have prayed to everything I

know!"—and the poor old woman sobbed as though he were already dead. Then the girl told her about the morning's experience, and it soon dawned on her that Granny had seen and heard all. Far from resenting this revelation, the great secret came to be a comfort, and they reveled in sharing it. The girl stroked the rough old hands and the furrowed brow. This was the old Granny who had tenderly reared her very own lover. They revived each other's hopes and courage. "Now child I have something more to tell you about this. You must remain brave and stand by me. I see that you love our Queer Person. You saw him as he was this morning and could not help it. You must never forget that I am very old and very wise. I can see it all, like looking into the bottom of a cool spring.

"There is a very bad danger in this war trail that will be hard to stop. In a dream I learned some of it. You remember the big fellow, Yellow Hand, who laughs so much, and who was beaten when you rode the little pinto against his white horse? And you remember he was on that war party when Middle Rider was killed, then later in the party when you went to war?" The girl's

heart turned to stone. She clutched her throat as though suffocating. "His grandfather was brother to my husband and was a man with a black heart. That laugh of Yellow Hand's is not a good laugh. It covers up other things too easily. White Music knows a lot that would make Yellow Hand kill in an instant if secrets could talk. White Music knows there is something bad in Yellow Hand's heart right now and has gone out in the same party to watch him. What his poison is we do not know. He boasted that he was glad Middle Rider was killed by the Shoshones, because once his own father was a Pikuni chief and that old Big Pipe could not live forever. Do you see what his bad heart is thinking? White Music thinks Yellow Hand knows something about the loss of the little chief. White Music could not learn it exactly. It makes me afraid, sometimes."

Singing Moon was wide eyed! Had her father been strong, she would have rushed to him with this news. To go now would be disastrous. Old and sick as he was, the chief would call for horses and go to seek Yellow Hand at once, and likely die from exhaustion before the sun could set

again. The thought was pure folly. This news must be borne in silence along with so many other things that had come to light recently.

"But what can Queer Person do about all this alone?" asked the girl in a small voice, a million miles away.

"I do not know," answered Granny thoughtfully and honestly, a far-away look in her eyes. "But I do know this; if he ever learns the dark things about Yellow Hand and if he finds Yellow Hand in his road on the trail, or even when he comes back, there will be food for the coyotes." After a pause Granny added: "The Yellow Hand wants you and your horses. What will you do if he returns with the little chief, *d-e-a-d* or alive?"

"What would the Singing Moon do?" queried the girl, studying Granny through narrowed lids. "If Yellow Hand is successful, even if the little chief is alive, I, too, know something about food for coyotes." And with a trembling hand she softly tapped the hilt of her knife.

CHAPTER XVII

Life on a Square-topped Butte

In the bend of the river, under the shadow of the high cut bank, stood the ungarnished warrior, Queer Person. Satisfied that he was not watched nor followed, he stood gazing up at the frozen stars. He was practising that call for guidance known best to Indians as the "evening-star prayer." His tone was more earnest than any cry for help that had risen from his soul before. He yearned with the fervor of a man's hopes and desires and ambitions; whereas, heretofore, his prayers had sprung from the heart of a child. It was very young manhood, very green manhood, that sat on those square shoulders, but it was manhood. In many ways he was no philosopher at all. Circumstances that had deprived him on the one hand, thus bringing him enough grief and depth, had, on the other hand, left him most unworldly.

Across the clean, blank span he had learned to create in his mind when praying, having shunted all things earthly from consciousness, he saw a large log gradually take form. Absolutely nothing else came in answer to the call. Upon opening, his eyes, he saw a pile of flotsam left by some angry freshet, in the midst of which reposed a log. For the fraction of a moment he studied it, seeking a connection. Presently it came! He laid aside his packs and accoutrements, then set to work to clear the log from the débris. This done, he shoved it into the water where it rode easily, anchored on the gravel. Next he strapped his pack on his shoulders again and sought a pole sufficiently stout and long for a propeller. His moccasins and leggings, having been removed, were stuffed under his belt, and he was ready.

Astride this log with the pole for a balance and motor power, he found himself carried with the current at a pace faster than a horse would travel on the prairie shuffle. When he was in smooth water the journey called for a little work. Stretches of riffles and occasional sand bars obliged him to use his rope to drag the log. Constantly he searched the banks ahead, for his

own night travels on foot taught him that enemies sometimes followed the banks of streams. Several times he startled deer or elk from the water's edge, and in one grassy bend a scrawny, old buffalo cow arose over her newborn calf to stare at him as he floated noiselessly by. Occasionally wolves or coyotes looked at him from high banks.

In defiance of the many curves, this stream that left no traces of its passenger carried him farther than he had ever traveled in one night. Dawn found him far in the land of some enemy tribe. He learned it this way. Upon reaching a wide shallow ford he drew his log up to the grassy bank, lifted out the end by way of anchor, and examined the shores. It was dangerous to consider further travel by this method in the daylight; besides, his feet were very cold from being held in the water so long. On both sides of the ford he made out signs where hundreds of travoix had left their pole tracks. He dared not attempt figuring the number of horses that had crossed there. And, yes, here were the barefoot tracks of little folks, and dogs, and the moccasin tracks of women who had dismounted to dip up water to

thirsty little throats. With his newly alive ears the tall investigator pictured to himself the happy babble of voices that had surrounded this spot. So real was the picture that he grew anxious lest there be eyes peering at him from all the leaves.

Standing on the shore under the now faded stars, he faced that bright summer planet so close to the horizon. Before he prayed he found himself wondering if Granny was up and watching the same star, and—might it not be possible that somebody from the big lodge had turned her eyes to the east this early morning away back there in the home camp? Or could it be perhaps that a different star shone there? He hoped it was the same, for here was companionship in his loneliness. Then he prayed. The stars implanted on his self-made prairie of the mind nothing more than the wide trail.

He noticed that all the horses' hoof tracks were headed away from him. To follow that trail seemed to be the indication. Years of caution had taught him to remain in the vicinity of the great swath cut in the prairie grass, so that he could see it from time to time, but never to place one foot

in it. Other spies like himself might follow that trail. The spies of the people who made it might be lurking about, although these horses had gone past at least three nights before.

So all that day he skirted rows of hills, mounted every safe prominence to study game herds, picked his way through dry runs, or was lost in the river timber only to reappear again far beyond. At night the trail dissolved into a sprawling camp. Until then he had no notion whom he was following, and now his wonder was ended—nay it was exchanged for a deeply rooted fear, for there lay a moccasin, discarded and worn, but bearing the telltale design of the Mountain Crows on its instep.

It might be well to state that the term "Crow" is a slang term applied to these people and is not especially complimentary. Their real name is "Absaroka" which, according to their interpretation, means "Sparrow Hawk." To this day they brand their horses on the left flank with the crude figure of a bird.

Granny had told him too often about these dreaded people for him not to fear. He picked up the forgotten footgear, examined it closely, and

ran his finger over the U-shaped outline that somewhat resembled a horse's hoofprint. Mixed feelings surged through him. Here he was afraid of a people whom he had never seen, hating someone who had never harmed him personally. For a moment he was inclined to laugh, but checked it, for Granny was wise in her teachings. She had lived so long that surely her convictions were well based.

After this he became doubly alert. When darkness made it safe he moved about the camp like a thing having to do with another world. At each hearth he thrust his bare hand into the ashes to discover if any live coals remained, but completed his rounds with no success. "They must still be three trips of the sun ahead," he thought to himself. Of food in this camp he found almost nothing. Evidently the Crow dogs did a thorough job. Like rabbits and other animals he curled up in the brush where the yellow grass was heaviest and was soon asleep.

Two days of monotonous trail followed. The camps brought him no more revelations. The third night sent him into some small degree of excitement, for nearly every hearth contained

heat. During his survey of this last deserted site he carried an arrow nocked in his bow all the time: his bones whispered danger. Leaving the place as soon as possible, he looked back at the two or three neglected tripods and pole food racks silhouetted against the evening sky. Ghostly place!

On the last day of following this trail Queer Person moved very slowly, scarcely exposing himself at all, sometimes crawling on his belly for long distances so that he might peer over ridges unobserved, or sliding from one sagebush to another. In fact, he became a veritable coyote for stealth. By dusk he dared to travel erectly, so made better time. As he topped a certain ridge the wind brought him an unmistakable sound, the neigh of a horse. All eyes and ears, he moved forward to the next high point, where his breath was quite taken away with the view that lay before him. Namely a great camp at least five times as large as that of the Pikuni, whom he called "my people." A tremendous volume of sound floated across the valley to him: calling of children, snatches of song, occasional vibrations of a tom-tom, horses neighing, the cries of herdsboys.

Surely the horse he had heard first was that of some picket, so he lay down for a while. It occurred to him that he had been following only about a fifth of the company. A rather square-topped butte lay between him and the camp; he decided to make a try for this observation point. At last he reached its top and was almost overjoyed to find it was crowned by a clump of yucca plants, as though designed for his especial purpose. Yucca or "soapweed" never seemed so companionable before.

There was still sufficient light to make out a haze over the entire valley from the hundreds of little fires whose twinkling looked like a reflected sky in a lake. What a perfectly unthinkable host of lodges! And horses! Surely there were no horses left any place else. His whole being teemed with suppressed excitement, and a violent trembling seized him from head to foot. All those people and not one friend. How tiny and impotent he felt as an enemy to that horde of humanity! He could stand it no longer, so turned to the stars for relief.

"O Eyes of the Shadow Times! I am but a weak warrior, a frail thing, only partly awake

at times. Yonder lights of the great, broad white path where the spirit wolves run, hear a child's voice! Look upon me as needy! Heal my lonesomeness and fear with thy wisdom! Touch my eyes that I may see as Hush-wing the owl, press my ears that I may hear as does the antelope, make my body quick and strong, even like the great cat of whose hide my arrow quiver is made. Lastly, hear my voice when danger lurks in shadows to steal my life!"

Closing his eyes and relaxing until a positive listlessness crept over his frame, he saw himself as an old man looking into a stranger's lodge. Instantly he sat bolt upright! Must he enter that great, dangerous camp and peer into strange lodges? Could it be that all this great trail and meeting this great camp so far away from his home had any connection with the lost boy of Big Pipe? But no time to tarry; an urge seized him, and he felt himself drawn down from his citadel of the plain toward the hundreds of people. He studied out a plan. Most of the people were headed for the massive structure in the center of the village, which he knew to be a giant sun-dance lodge where the ceremonies of a powerful

religious revival were being held. This lodge was built like the one his kindred constructed the summer they joined all the other Blackfeet peoples for about the same performance.

It consisted of a stockade in a circle opened toward the east. Inside this was another circle of stockade logs, but much fewer so as not to obstruct the activities in the enclosure; then in the very center was a tall, upright green cottonwood pole, much larger than a tepee pole, and bearing many green branches on its top. Before darkness really settled Queer Person could plainly see these leafy branches. Tepee poles had been lashed from the stockade outside to the next circle and then to the center pole as the framework of a roof, while green willow and cottonwood branches were scattered over the top to act as a sunshade during the day.

Fate had digged him a pit that day from which only a nimble wit could extricate him. Somewhere from the back of his memory one of Granny's stories was struggling to the foreground. Ah, yes, here it is! Once a man invaded an enemy camp that he might learn a great secret about their ceremonies, and conceiving the idea that

his enemies might respect courage he entered without weapons. Upon his being captured, a young chieftain, discovering he had no arms, pronounced him "Friend" because of his courage and thus saved his life. There was every danger in the world of his being captured in this place, and he wondered if almost any slender thread of safety would not be good medicine. From the reputation Granny had given these Mountain Crows he certainly was contemplating going into bad society!

Since so many were attending the ceremonials, he might be able to search a certain portion of the village without molestation. It would be necessary to use some disguise, to be somebody else. How would it be to turn into a deaf, lame, old man? Without further to-do he clawed one of his braids of hair so that part of his face would be covered—it occurred to him that his hair was altogether too heavy and too black for most of the old people he had seen—hunched his robe up about his ears, and started cautiously down the hill toward the nearest tepees. He stumbled over a willow that someone had used

for driving horses and was glad to find it stout enough to lean on as a walking staff.

Just then to his utter dismay two people talking rather loudly, not one word of which could he understand, appeared not far distant, coming toward him. Instantly our actor fell into an exaggerated lameness, an almost cruel hump appeared in that straight back, and he leaned on his staff with great effort, his face bent toward the ground. Crunch-crunch, pat-pat, talk-talk, came the two men. Now they were passing the poor, decrepit old man, near enough to touch him with a stick, but they kept right on without the least interruption. Queer Person stopped, straightened up, fetched a ponderous breath, and placed a hand on his knees to stay their violent shaking! Soon he passed some others, all headed toward the great center of activity. His ruse had worked several times now and he was less anxious.

When this area seemed sufficiently deserted he began to approach the lodges. Once a dog proved ugly; again, he found two old people before a fire, smoking pipes. In some lodges were mothers caring for the little people, mostly put-

ting them to bed. These he did not approach, of course, merely squatting down in the light from the doorway at a distance to study them briefly. Enemy children! They didn't look so very different from those of his own people: round faced, pudgy, little brown things they were!

Some of the fans of light that stretched from the doorways were very brilliant, and here they were always peopled with moths and night things. He joined the moths with stealthy tread. Some lodges were entirely deserted. These he deliberately entered. Many times he found beds full of sleeping children, and in each case he studied them carefully. To look for an individual child in that infested place seemed a hopeless task, and he grew discouraged. Why, these Crows had more children than all the other people he ever knew existed, almost as many as they had horses! At the entrance of one lodge, well inhabited with little sleepers, he found considerable loose dusty soil from much tramping, so found it necessary to break off a leafy weed top and dust over his own tracks.

Thus did he spend most of the night, this human mole, nosey, silent, and nocturnal. A third

HIS WHOLE BEING TEEMED WITH SUPPRESSED EXCITEMENT.
ALL THOSE PEOPLE AND NOT ONE FRIEND

of the village had been superficially searched; in fact, so scantily that he considered it a wild project. Yet some small inner voice urged him not to yield the chase; why, he could not see for the life of him. Carefully choosing his route out of the scary place, he happened to be passing a certain lodge when a mild something or other coming along the breeze electrified him. It was the odor of roasting meat. Then it was that our spy realized he had not actually eaten anything worth while for several days. Following the cue, he peered into the lodge to see a stick supported by rocks, and over the smoldering fire on the end of the stick was suspended a roast of boss ribs (from the buffalo hump).

How he needed that meat! So he simply pilfered it. At the river he drank deeply and long. It would be a day ere he could get water again. Away from the village, he experienced tremendous relief from strain; so he walked leisurely and thoughtfully back to his fortress, where he found his equipment exactly as he had left it, and sitting down cross legged made himself intimately acquainted with the roast. He did not merely eat; he threw himself at it violently.

Knowing that whatever the next day brought him he must be as rested and wide awake as possible, he determined to sleep until daylight, so rolling in his robe at once he was soon asleep.

So tired was he that daylight was actually upon him ere he awoke, and the sun was just edging over the hills. He started in alarm, wondering where he was, then cowered down as flat as a horned toad. The day passed without events as far as he was concerned, although once he was greatly frightened to see a band of women riding back to camp on some higher land, where, if they had been discerning, they might have had great advantage for viewing the top of this butte. Once a herdsboy rode past on a loping pony, and Queer Person could see the whites of his eyes. Perhaps the reason the Crow chieftains thought it not necessary to maintain a picket on this butte was simply because it was too near to be of importance. The actual picket lines were conspicuous farther back.

It was hot and uncomfortable there in the broad sunlight, and flies were not the least of his troubles. But the coolness of evening came up from the river and altered all this. Night made

him entertain cowardly possibilities, first of which was to leave this awful place and escape the strain and worry. He wondered why he had ever undertaken such a hazardous expedition. There were the cool, high stars again, familiar groups, his only friends in this strange land. "You are eyes with no voice," said he aloud. "Can thy wisdom see an outcome of this tangle into which thy poor warrior has walked all unbidden?"

The answer seemed to be: "Search again if thou wouldst have wisdom thyself."

So saying to himself, "Pity, now an old man!" he gathered his robe and staff ready for the evening's business.

To enter new territory for his seemingly fruitless search required his course to pass the ceremonial lodge at rather close quarters. If no other gain were possible from the whole adventure, he might at least stand in that crowd about the sun-dance lodge and learn something of the famous Crow blood tortures. To boast among his own people of witnessing a Mountain Crow sun dance would certainly amount to something in the eyes of his superiors. But he bore on into that

region beyond the great crowd to carry on his desultory search. In a smaller camp he could not have enjoyed nearly the degree of safety that this ponderous population supplied, for people come to know each other too well in lesser groups. Finally he even dared to walk upright and quite undisguised past a group proceeding to the functions. He received not so much as a glance. Dangerous business, though; he thought he would not tempt fate.

Returning very late, he stood at a little distance and listened to the singing. The melodies seemed quite similar to those that his people employed. He went to the river for water, then again climbed to his lair, where he ate the last of the boss-rib roast.

During the next morning a rabbit jack saved the life of this Pikuni spy. A band of fifteen or twenty youngsters, mostly boys, were playing "tribe on the march," having harnessed their dogs to small travoix on which were little improvised packs. Halfway up the butte they were about to organize a portion of their number into a raiding party to attack the caravan.

The hidden enemy was anything but brave

when he found himself in imminent danger of discovery by these little folks! Queer Person was every inch a savage. To kill the children of a hereditary enemy was a matter of comparatively small importance among his people, but he himself was not trained in matters of blood. He was a savage, but could have been more so. He was there to seek and save a child if possible, but to kill other children in order to accomplish his special end was a matter of abhorrence. During the approach of the would-be travelers his lean body turned hot and cold many times. His store of tricks contained no remedy for such an exigency as this! Who under the sun could have predicted it, anyhow?

Just as he asked himself if it would be possible for him to frighten this little band into silence and haul them one at a time to a crushing death behind the screen of yucca, the dogs gave violent tongue to the chase and mostly broke away from their young masters. A huge jack rabbit dashed from behind a yucca bush that was growing halfway down the slope. Away went the rabbit in tremendous leaps around the side of the fortress and down the long incline, occasion-

ally varying his gait with one of those observation hops that have made his kind famous. The dogs lost distance, also packs and travoix all the way. Probably no jack-rabbit hunt was ever more keenly and satisfactorily observed by man. The select audience of one trembled in a cold, wet chill from the unspeakable possibilities contained in the whole episode. To say he was relieved is no description of his feelings.

"May the fiends punish them if they come this way again!" he breathed.

The most dangerous section of the camp remained for him to search on the third night—that part away beyond the sun-dance lodge. He must travel through a densely populated sector of the great circle, which in itself was a real hazard, in order to reach the unexplored area. Suppose something about his figure belied the assumed cloak of senility, or imagine the outcome if some young Crow spoke to him on a serious matter and discovered that he could not render a word of the Crow language? But he was in this game so deeply now that there was no turning back. It must be seen through to the last act, for his medicine was screaming for action. Queer

Person summoned his lagging resources, gathered up his robe and staff, affectionately patted the dry sand that covered his buried quiver and bow, then descended the hill. He longed to spy on their secrets! As he proceeded to the new field of labor he could not help thinking how wonderful it would be if that familiar ruse of semi-idiocy would serve for a disguise and protection here—as in the home camp!

CHAPTER XVIII

Blood and Buffalo Skulls!

The dreaded region beyond the ceremonial lodge was at last covered to the best of his ability, and he was returning to his hiding place when he noticed that some phase of the sun dance had reached a point of high excitement. Elbowing his way among the onlookers, he realized his chance for observation had arrived! The eager crowd had pulled down most of the brush about the walls of the lodge and were so deeply engrossed in what they saw that an additional member joined their group without causing the slightest distraction. Now, at last, Queer Person was to see things with his own eyes that had hitherto been mere fabric in camp-fire stories.

Candidates for the endurance tests were waiting in line for the final preparations. They had been properly and variously painted this long time. Several had the entire upper part of the

body painted with a white clay, while others were barred with green and vermilion. Two had one half the body painted one color from ear to toes, while the other side was painted in a contrasting color.

The thing that held our spy enrapt, was certain work being done by a medicine man at the head of the line. He was placing wooden skewers in the skin of the brave young breasts presented to him. This operation was done by pinching up the skin with two fingers of one hand while a narrow-bladed knife was thrust through the skin with the other; then before releasing the skin the medicine man calmly reached to a little pile of the polished sticks, selected what he thought was appropriate, and thrust it through the two apertures. After this he selected a long thong, one end of which had been split, and fastened this to the skewer. Two of these were attached to the breast of each candidate, one on either side. However, a few more daring ones preferred having the skewers fastened on their backs. From time to time, as the old operator's hands became too slippery with blood, he turned to wipe them on a very much soiled piece of buckskin.

During the placing of these devices not a sound escaped the lips of the youths. But Queer Person observed that many had their lips tightly compressed, and their entire bodies were rigid. Some held their arms stiffly at their sides, hands clenched. One very tall, good-looking fellow laughed outright, and for the moment our spy suspected him of hysteria rather than bravery. As fast as the old man completed his work the performers entered the arena, proudly trailing their thongs. From their incisions, bright little rivulets of blood trickled down through the paint. Several bled profusely so that even their legs were splashed with the drip.

Once under the rafters of the flimsy roof with its brush awning, they fell into the charge of several other medicine men. The thongs were tied to the poles aloft, only allowing the dancers enough slack with which to perform. Four of the young men whose thongs had been attached in the back, signified that they wanted buffalo skulls tied to the trailing ends. Right here, the tall nervous boy attracted a lot of attention. He had actually persuaded the old operator to place additional skewers on the sides of his legs

below the knees as well as in his back. Muffled cries of admiration arose when this was observed.

None of the dancers wore any sort of head decoration and their bodies were quite naked except for the breech clout and moccasins. From the neck of each, however, was suspended a whistle of eagle bone, the distal end of which bore a single white fluffy eagle plume. The spy realized that in the ordeals to come the contestants were not to use their hands in any way toward freeing themselves. Meantime, no signal was given for a general start. Each dancer commenced as soon as his thongs were attached to some object, either the rafters or loose skulls. From the time he took his first step in the performance he incessantly blew his bone whistle and faced the sun shield high on the center pole. He yanked, and twisted, and pulled, and threw himself about in a mad endeavor to break out the strands of his own skin that held the skewers in place. Some were over the ordeal in a short time, while others, whose skins were thicker, or whose skewers were set deeper, were obliged to carry on the fight much longer. During the strug-

gles the families and friends of the candidates cheered them on with yells.

Queer Person found himself giving little attention to the general crowd. His interest was centered on the nervous one. This slight dancer had caused a medicine man to suspend great, heavy skulls clear of the ground on the sides of his legs, and instead of allowing those attached to his back to drag on the ground these, too, were suspended just high enough to bang against those on his legs with every jump he took. The audience was perfectly silent when he sprang into the midst of the whistling dancers. His supreme courage shocked them breathless! But there was one among that audience who was carried beyond control by the bravery of this slender boy, and that was Queer Person! Before he realized what had happened he found himself hooting and yelling with admiration! Instantly a man at his elbow stared at him, but not for long. That yell was too contagious; the Crow neighbor repeated it himself. Thus it came about that our timid spy stood in the midst of deadly enemies and actually led the cheering for a foreign sun dancer!

As they broke themselves loose most of the

performers fell into semiconsciousness from pain and loss of blood. Watchful attendants dragged them away from the flying feet into the reach of members of their family who carried them away for treatment. One fell before he was free and had to be revived and cheered in order to continue.

Queer Person's favorite was now dancing with labored breath and glassy eye since his capacity for frenzy had reached its zenith. What would have been his thought had he been aware that an unknown admirer in the outskirts was praying for him? Finally the cruel lumbering skull on the left leg tore itself loose and rolled clear away from the arena. So sudden was it that the change in weight nearly threw the dancer from his feet. Regaining his balance again, he faced the sun shield with renewed determination. Queer Person yelled more enthusiastically than ever when he saw the second skull go careening off among the legs of the attendants.

Even with his own legs freed, just how could he ever get rid of those gruesome weights dragging from his back? The narrow strands of living skin had stretched appallingly, and the once

weathered skulls seemed revived to freshness with their generous drenching of the dancer's blood. Frantic twisting, leaps, and sudden turns were all futile. But at last the onlookers suspected some purpose in the fact that the tall figure was dancing between two companions who were dragging their skulls. With one quick lurch the slender fellow threw himself, back down, across the thongs of one of his companions, supporting himself for one brief moment on his hands. When he arose a wild cheer drowned out all other sounds, for he had entangled his own two skulls in those of the other victim. Few saw or understood the gesture, but all knew what was to happen now. With one tremendous charge he roughly yanked his mate in misery clear of his feet, not only freeing himself completely, but removing one skull from the other man's back. The two contestants were so near Queer Person when it happened that he could have reached a hand in to stay the fall of his favorite. Crack! Something had broken! The falling boy had clenched his teeth on the bone whistle and ground it to pieces. Unconsciously he blew the whole thing toward his enemy admirer, so that

Queer Person's face received a shower of bone fragments and spray. To the enemy this seemed like an indication of good rather than an omen of evil. Then the tall warrior measured his length on the ground with such violence that he slid, plowing his features into the dust. After this he lay quite still.

Sudden weakness overran the limbs of the spy and he grew afraid. Where was he? What had he said? What had he done? Did the crowd suspect him yet? Looking about him, he realized that not one soul there was concerned with him in the slightest.

During the lulls in songs, tom-tom beats, and other sounds he became conscious of a sort of undertone that varied from depth to shrillness, almost like the subdued voice of a half-grown puppy coming from underground. Now it came in short yelps, then again in long wails, sometimes stopping altogether. At last, as the ceremonies were about to cease, he realized it was necessary to join some departing group of elderly people and thus make a safe escape to his elevated nest.

His opportunity came, and with exaggerated

dependence on his staff, ears muffled in his robe, he fell in with a group headed in the general direction of his hiding place. Just as he turned his back the strange sounds that had proved of such curiosity came forth in volume once more. He could not stay, and yet he did so want to know the medicine whereby this series of noises was produced. While passing a small band of picketed war ponies, for no well-defined reason at all, he altered his course and soon found his steps leading among the little animals, where he threw himself on the ground. Peering through the forest of horses' legs, he saw the last of the audience start homeward.

The old master of ceremonies, a medicine man, the very one who adjusted the skewers, retired to a small tepee set up in the big sun-dance lodge itself. The two old women who had been appointed as fire attendants laid on some heavy chunks of wood. This caused the fires to smoke rather fiercely and would maintain the coals until morning. Once the sun-dance fires were kindled they must never be allowed to die out! Were they to do so it would mean an unutterably

dire calamity would befall the people. One may well imagine the deep sense of relief experienced by the fire attendants once the last ceremonial was completed.

No shadow ever stole through a village more softly than did this enemy Blackfoot. He did not walk; he did not creep; he flowed. He circled the entire stockade, sometimes hearing the strange noises, sometimes not, but when audible they seemed very far away. As nearly as he could figure now, this whining spirit sound came from above, and the only way whereby it would be *proved* was by examining the flimsy roof. Casting his robe in a soft bundle to the top, he then threw a loop of his robe over the end of a stockade and hauled himself up. Once he was there, the utmost caution was required to prevent the poles from creaking. Catlike, on hands and knees, he reached the center pole and found himself standing erect among the gifts placed there for the gods. These were never intended for human touch again. Yet this seeker of truth deigned to profane this custom in an enemy camp, whereas among his own people the mere thought of such

sacrilege would have caused him to shiver with repugnance. Always it seemed that some weird force was urging him on.

His learned hands played gently over a marvelous quiver of arrows. He longed to steal it! Here was a shield of several thicknesses of bull hide, eagle tail feathers dangling from the entire lower circumference. Then in the dim light he realized his hands were caressing a white buffalo robe, that rarest of rare! There were many things higher than his head, but about even with his face was a longish bundle bound in tanned hide and lashed with thongs.

As he examined this bundle, lo! the strange sounds that had so piqued his wonder issued from it! He drew back! Fingers that could almost see reached again to this object and slowly traced its form. It was the figure of a very young person, a slender form indeed, and it quivered as though with dying breath. A faintness seized the seeker, and he barely missed falling from his doubtful perch!

With trembling, cold hands he cut the thongs holding the bundle to the center pole, also those about the limp figure, and gently pulled the

wrappings away from the face. Whoever it was yet breathed, for a deep sigh escaped. The person was unconscious, which fact was a blessing right now. Stories of the human sacrifice of the Mountain Crows stood out in his memory. How he reached the stockades again he never recalled; anyhow, he soon lowered the bundle of pulsing flesh to his robe, which was already on the ground. With one of his famous feline springs he alighted noiselessly beside the bundle. It seemed he was never happier to feel the earth beneath his feet in his whole life!

The seven sisters had now swung in their complete orbit, and he involuntarily cast a haunted look eastward where the thing he dreaded was palely evident, the coming day. Stooping over the pinched face of the almost dead child, he summoned all his courage and studied the little countenance carefully.

It was Sun Pipe!

Emotions stirred violently within him, like sudden circles in a pond. When the ripples began splashing the edge of his soul's pond a black despair gripped his heart. Sweat stood in great beads on his over-lean body. Kneeling, he gath-

ered the bundle in quaking arms and did something he could not remember ever having done before. In fact, he little understood his act. He pressed his face against that of the unconscious boy and his lips crept softly to the almost lifeless ones before him. Tears! tears! many hot tears, and there in the midst of an enemy camp! Broken, choking tones voiced his prayer.

"Singing Moon, thou who art named from the Mother of the Night, try, oh, try! to hear the voice of thy Queer Person, warrior. The little chief is found! Thy brother, the son of our own Big Pipe is lost no more. Beautiful Girl, go thou out along the river and pray to the stars as we have been taught, that thou mayst hear my message of courage. Go to the dying mother on the hill and lift her heart. Take her to the sad, old leader of our people and together, all three, pray that the good gods may give your Queer Person great spirit power. Make bravery lead in the trail ahead, and make happiness follow in the footprints behind!"

He raised his head to look at the ghastly center pole of the sun-dance lodge as it blackened itself and its gifts against the stars. His anger boiled

up fiercely. Only the keenest sense of needed caution prevented his flying at the whole structure, tooth and nail!

Gathering the child in his robe, he ran softly around the stockade, took a rapid survey of the outlook, measuring at the same time the distance to the river brush. He prayed that the village was more weary than ever before in all its history.

Breaking the medicine of an enemy is a serious matter, and it was not until Queer Person was halfway to the river that he grew afraid this might prove disastrous to him.

There are always old people who, failing to enter the strenuous festivities of the sun dance, do not require the great amount of sleep needed by the others. These always arise at dawn to putter about on numberless odd jobs. An old woman issued forth from her tepee, stone maul in hand bent on an excursion for wood, her dogs at her heels. She stopped in the midst of a prodigious yawn and stretched. Her dogs were growling; so she followed their gaze. The half light revealed the lowered figure of a man running with something in his arms. His strides were

long, and he was almost in the timber. Had he not cast frequent glances backward, the old woman's suspicions might not have been aroused to action, but, as it was, she gave vent to the war cry of her people, bellowing again and again. Life in the shape of half-naked warriors poured from the lodges, the old creature continuing to scream, pointing meantime toward the now concealed figure in the brush.

Alas! he was surrounded! Queer Person knew more than to waste his strength in futile attempts at escape now, for he might have to fight. He merely bent his shoulders over the inert bundle to protect it from the rocks and arrows that were seeking him out. It was not long that he endured this hail, however, and fortunately only rocks had bruised him, when the turmoil was considerably abated by the loud, resonant voice of a commanding young chieftain. This man was making most successful strides toward the enemy, who now stood at bay like a trapped animal.

Bodily, Queer Person stood naked like his assailants, after the fashion of their common race, which relation he felt not; but his spirit seemed stripped of its very substance. In every

breath lurked dismay. When he and his enemy stood face to face the Crow eyed him with hate and suspicion. The Pikuni quite unconsciously drew himself to his full height, holding the precious burden to his breast, his wide eyes gradually settling to the dense shadows that had curtained them through other distressing experiences.

When, lo! whom did he see in the face of the young chieftain? None other than the nervous, agile dancer of the buffalo skulls! Such was the power of recuperation in these healthy, brown youths of the plains.

There came a brief moment of hope and courage. The eyes of the one were quick, piercing, fiery, full of wonder and questions, and, withal, not especially evil. As they gazed into the shadowy almost foliagelike depths of the captive's eyes some of their fierceness melted into mild interest.

"Who are you and what do you want?" demanded the Crow. The language of his interlocutor was so bewildering that the recently quelled fear began creeping up his spine again, and Queer Person merely stared. He had heard the language of his own people only a few winters and this

thing of hearing the tongue of another people, caused a childhood instinct to assert itself. He laid the bundle on the ground, stepped astraddle it, and replied with his hands, those same agile, graceful, ever-ready hands that had always served him so well. The Crow was surprised at his eloquence.

"I am Pikuni, and I came here to get that," he said, and pointed to the bundle. A rough hand from an onlooker sought to snatch open the bundle, for the crowd was enormous now, and surged about him noisily. With one lightning-like stroke Queer Person came down forcibly with the edge of his right hand, axewise, on the wrist of the presumptuous one. Instantly several struck him in return and many spat upon him. The young chief cried: "He is unarmed, you beasts! Can't you see he is brave? He served you justly! Now"—turning to Queer Person—"you open the bundle and show me."

This done, all were struck dumb. Savage demonstrations and demands for his life suddenly broke forth again, since he had broken the medicine of blood sacrifice. It became necessary for

the young chief to summon a group of his fraternity brothers to surround himself and the captive. This cordon of young guards instantly allayed all possibility of the promised violence; Queer Person derived little solace out of this, for he imagined he was to be saved for some worse and more dramatic end. Some powerful medicine must open from the skies to his rescue!

The circle was broken for an instant while a little wizened man made his entry at the demand of the chieftain. The fire that shone from the ferretlike eyes of this undersized, humped, mere remnant of a person, was in vast contrast with the outward shell.

"Talk to this man and find out who he is and what his work is in our village," ordered the young chief in Absaroka. At the first word in his own language from the ancestral one our captive quivered inside and dared to entertain his first faint ray of hope since the commotion started. He seized the little man by the shoulders and poured forth a volume of Pikuni that caused the crowd again to surge against the locked arms of the protectors. This time it was mostly

curiosity that prompted them. Perfect silence reigned when the little interpreter turned to speak with the chief.

"He says he came here from Big Pipe's band of Pikuni to seek this child and that his medicine was good. That he has no weapons other than a little food knife and that coil of rope. He came with no intent to kill." A nervous laugh rang out from somewhere on the outskirts of the throng, causing the captive to start. Queer Person found his eyes wandering to the butte that had served as his citadel during the time of his sojourn in this Crow camp. There it was silhouetted against the coming sun. Oh, if he could only have made that haven of safety this once and remained quiet until the friendly darkness came again! His present trouble was due to breaking the enemy medicine, but would he have it otherwise now that he had found Sun Pipe? In his heart he plotted that upon the first positive indication of torture and death for himself he would first put this suffering child out completely, thereby depriving these dreaded people of replacing the human sacrifice on that awful center pole. But back he came to the mo-

ment, for the young chief was talking. The interpreter turned to the captive, saying:

"Our chief says you are a brave man and that he finds you to be a strong warrior. He would turn you loose for this brave deed but the council of the village would not let him. He says that he must take you to the head chief and the council now." At this, Queer Person again gathered up the still unconscious Sun Pipe and followed the young chief.

They reached a very large well decorated tepee and entered, the mob having been restrained without. In the lodge sat the head chief, an old man, evidently the father of the younger one, while on either side were ranged some ten important characters of the village. By now the sun was up and was casting its shafts almost horizontally through the doorway. The young chief spoke at length, during which time the whole council studied the captive. There was a quantity of glowering and grunts of disapproval, but on some faces dwelt mild hints of admiration. The austere court debated among themselves awhile and finally the little interpreter announced to the captive that some wanted to have

him killed at once. Others there were who voted that he be given a chance; that is, subjected to a trial, a test, an ordeal. A compromise had been made and he was to be retained as a captive in this very lodge four days and four nights, with the little boy, and if he endured the trial successfully he would be allowed to take the child and depart. With this the council broke up. One of the women in the household took over the little boy, for he had now recovered consciousness and needed food.

That night the two Pikuni, the little one and the long, slim one, were bedded under the same robe. They whispered together in their own language for a little while, deep under the covers. The little fellow, who was greatly refreshed by the food and rest, asked:

"Are you really Queer Person from home?"

"Yes, little warrior, I am."

"But our Queer Person talked only with his hands. Did something happen to you?"

"Yes, a wonderful thing! One day I became overheated and some evil things that had pressed on my ears all my life were forced to go away. This was four winters ago. I have learned to hear

and speak as you do. Yet I am the same Queer Person, your Queer Person. I have great medicine now, almost like that of Crane's Talk, only he is older and wiser than I. My medicine brought me on the trail of the enemy that carried you away from your mother and the great chieftain, your father, yet not once have I seen your footprint since leaving home. My medicine showed me how to release you from the sun-dance pole before your light went out. And now, if the early morning stars still find me good to look upon, they shall show my medicine a way whereby I may get us both back to the lodges of our people. Now we must stop talking and grow strong for the trials that are sure to come."

His last thought was that whatever nefarious scheme these Crows hatched his own medicine would summon sufficient strength to obviate it.

CHAPTER XIX

That Hated Sun-Dance Pole

NEXT morning food was brought to them. Food from an enemy hand, bitter though it be, was better than none at all. Queer Person thought: "How different this world of captivity and cruel forebodings as compared with yesterday!" No matter, this food would be restoring their strength that they might fight the very givers. Neither of the two captives had any serious bodily injuries as yet, nor was there any immediate prospect of their being put to death now that the little one was off the center pole.

Just then, as though in answer to his thought, the old Pikuni appeared to inform Queer Person that if he made so much as the slightest attempt to escape he would be slaughtered at once. But in spite of the dire import of this message there was something in the tone and face of the speaker that told Queer Person plainly both he and Sun

Pipe had a very sincere friend in the midst of this enemy camp. "I would not hold you myself, but would turn you loose because you are brave for coming here without weapons," thought our erstwhile deaf man, for he could not get the words of the young chief out of his foreground of thought! And again his mind wandered home to Granny and her ways of instructing him. What wisdom lay in all the wise sayings and stories of his ancient benefactress! If ever he escaped from this den of body snatchers he would prove himself worthy of the almost unbelievable kindness he had received at her hands.

Presently the head wife brought some warm water and a certain sulphurous clay with which she began to bathe Sun Pipe. While doing so she did not so much as glance at the older captive. His eyes, however, were upon her all the while. Her touch seemed kindly and her face shone with a motherly gentleness as if she, too, might be somewhat under the spiritual spell felt by all those who came in contact with Sun Pipe. Soon Queer Person found himself wanting to believe that her gentleness was prompted by her disapproval of the human sacrifice. On the morn-

ing of their capture, some of these Crow women had expressed a savagery exceeding that of their lords! This one was different.

Sun Pipe yielded to these administrations completely, showing neither fear nor confidence in the Absaroka woman. Perhaps his former treatment as they prepared him for the sacrifice was so cruel that all his childish resistance had been exhausted. Queer Person knew that the venom expressed in the sacrifice on the pole was probably enhanced because some of these people had lost relatives at the hands of his tribesmen not many moons back.

When they were once more alone the man determined to hear Sun Pipe's part of the story. The child seemed almost recovered to his normal state of mind, whereas the previous night he had been dazed and feeble almost unto death. In answer to Queer Person's question he replied:

"I was trying to count coup on a cottontail and followed the rabbit into the sage by our tepee. Right near a big hole in the ground was a big man lying in the shadows. He pulled me down, tied something over my mouth, bound my hands, rolled me in a robe, and dragged me away."

BALANCING, WITH ARMS OUTSTRETCHED, HE MADE A LEAP

"What did he look like?"

"I don't remember very well, but I knew him."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"Yes, many times."

"You had seen him many times?" nearly yelled Queer Person, at the same time seizing the child almost roughly. The boy stared; this sudden fierceness of his beloved Queer Person was unexpected. The little chin quivered.

"Did this big man laugh?" demanded the older Pikuni.

"Yes, a lot. He laughed most after he had tied me to a horse and we had journeyed away. I could hear him through the robe."

Queer Person dropped his hands from the boy and scowled at the open doorway. This thief of children was big; the victim had seen him many times; and he laughed a great deal. Had he not heard a familiar laugh from the mob who surrounded him on the morning of the capture? The laugh he had heard was alarmingly similar to that of Yellow Hand. Could it be that Yellow Hand was that despised thing, an enemy spy in their own camp, that Singing Moon had attributed to himself only a few days ago when she

was making her brave effort to adjust so many new facts in her consciousness? If so, the traitor, being in this camp, among Crows would make escape very difficult.

While the Pikuni knew he was being rigorously watched, his only guard was apparently an old woman who sat on the shady side of the lodge in plain sight, smoking a long-stemmed pipe. She wiped the back of her bony wrist across her mouth from time to time and cast a squinty glance at the lodge door. In the distance against the sky was the familiar butte that had sheltered him those days of strange watchfulness. How he would remember that prominence! Beyond it lay the great prairies, distant horizons fringed with grasses and jagged with inky pines. Beyond these: home, friends, safety. And more: love. Could she hear his thoughts? Had she gone to the early stars for medicine talk and prayer and had she given his name to the stars?

Nothing particular happened during the other three days of their captivity. Both were in need of the rest. Plenty of food was supplied them and they slept a great deal, the man, less at night, for he knew that murderers moved best in shadows.

On that last morning of their imprisonment Sun Pipe's legs had regained much of their old vigor. The man and boy were to be out under the sky again, perhaps for the last time. If they were to die, it would be fighting. The child clung to the hand of his tall friend and trudged bravely at his side as a guard conducted them to the sun-dance lodge. Menacing glances from the assembled crowd made it most evident that eager and blood-thirsty hands would seize them instantly were it not for the vigilance of their superiors.

At the entrance of the great ceremonial structure the captives recoiled at the sight that greeted their eyes, the older one because he understood, the younger one from reflection. A pit, something the length of a bow in depth, had been lined with a green bull hide, skin side up and pegged to the ground around the top. This was filled with water. Near by some old men were skinning freshly killed buffalo bull heads. The lower jaws were being removed and the main part of the heads dipped into the water, which act rendered them so slimy and slippery that they could not be carried except by the horns.

All these preparations were indicative of one thing, and it stood out in Queer Person's mind in most horrifying reality. He was to be subjected to the "porcupine dance," a thing practised on captives and criminals by his own people. Almost no one ever escaped the horrible death that awaited at the end.

Seven heads were arranged in a row from the back of the arena in the lodge to the entrance, a long stride apart, while from the entrance, stretching away toward the east, were two long parallel lines of young warriors armed with bows and arrows, and each of these men, as the captives could see, held an arrow nocked even at this moment. The victims were supposed to start from the back, stepping on each of the skulls with one foot at a time, using the arms for balance. If their feet so much as touched the ground before they could reach the entrance, a signal was given by some judges, and the armed warriors released their shafts. Because the targets were easy to hit under the circumstances, they usually ended with their bodies literally sprayed with arrows, hence the name porcupine dance.

The young chief was now standing before the

Pikuni, having brought the little interpreter with him. No others stood nearer than the length of a lariat except the old men dipping the heads, and they seemed too engrossed in their ugly business to pay attention to the conversation of others. In a low tone the interpreter informed him:

"The chief says that he would not hold you for this. You are too brave to be allowed to die this way. He is sorry. He says you are to carry the child on your back through the trial." Queer Person retained a stony face through this recital, wishing in his heart that he could believe the Crow chief meant his words. Then he asked:

"What becomes of the child should I be killed and not he?"

The little old man replied to this instantly:

"The chief says he himself will care for the child, and when opportunity comes will release him in your camp with his own hands."

"What proof do I have that the chief will keep his word?" And here the reply came in sign language. The Crow lifted his right hand high, opening the palm toward the Pikuni, the recent wounds in his back causing him to wince at the same time. He gave his heart to the sun. The

open palm indicated that there were no weapons concealed against him.

Then Queer Person signed his readiness. The interpreter detained him a moment longer, walking around him, studying him from head to foot, minutely. Unsatisfied on some question or other, he asked:

"Is this child yours?"

"No," came the reply. "No blood of mine."

"Is he the son of a chief?"

"No," promptly lied Queer Person.

In walking slowly to the rear of the lodge the captives realized the buzz of talk in the crowds was hushed to low whispers. Queer Person caused himself to be absorbed in prayer. There were no stars apparent that he might receive a certain reply to his entreaties. The little boy, not knowing the danger that awaited them, merely followed orders and led his tall thoughtful friend to the beginning of an awful doom. Nevertheless, across the empty consciousness of the prayerful one's mind came a faint—oh! ever so faint—vision of a most strange and common little act.

Now they had reached the first skull, and he opened his eyes to peer into the upturned face

of the little boy. Yes; the suggestion was worth trying. Stooping to his knees, Queer Person began adjusting the belt, G-string, and leggings of the little fellow, turning him about as he did so. So long was he in arranging the garment of the child that angry comments began to pop out here and there in back of them. There were no people near their end of the lodge, since the atmosphere promised almost certain death to captives and onlookers alike.

The delay was due to the fact that the stooping Pikuni was spitting in two places in the sandy soil, and his nearly abject fear had so dried his mouth that it was difficult to manufacture the necessary lubricant. He had hastily placed two little stones in his mouth to accelerate matters and this worked wonders. Finally he arose and placed one hand on each of the little companion's shoulders, saying:

"To-day, Sun Pipe is a great warrior! He is the son of a brave and much loved chief. To-day Sun Pipe is as brave as his father. No matter what happens, he cries out in pain nor fear, not one bit!" The copper midget swelled perceptibly with pride at these remarks. Without further

ado he found himself swung to his tall brother's back, where he automatically locked his arms about the neck of his carrier and his legs about the hips.

There lay the first head, yet dripping water from its black horns. Praying that the sand would gather on the soles of his moccasins, for he had been standing some time in the two moist places in order to make this possible, he carefully placed one foot squarely on the center of the forehead of the skull.

Balancing, with arms outstretched, he made a successful leap to the second; the third was not on exactly solid ground, so his weight caused it to rock and nearly upset him; but with the remaining four he made quick and accurate business, ending directly at the entrance to the lodge in the very faces of the nearest armed men of the two parallel lines. Here he swung the child to the ground and stood as though in a daze. His breath was labored, and he trembled.

Instantly a great yell arose from the disappointed archers! They had been cheated, deprived of the blood of a dangerous enemy!

On the other hand, there was a vast majority

in the audience, men, women and children alike, who lost the dark countenances of hate and simply stared in awe. Here was a man who had defied and overcome the dangers of the porcupine dance; hence his medicine must be most powerful! How had he come to know where to find the captive child? How had he proven so invisible as to stalk about through their village at his will, seeking as he saw fit, without fear and without weapons? (Fear there was in the heart of Queer Person, but long years of acting had lent him a power). And now he had placed himself above some of their greatest medicine men. Surely they had far more to deal with than what greeted the eye! The friendship of this person was best courted and his ill will placated to the end.

While regaining his composure Queer Person distinctly heard that same mocking laugh from somewhere in the ranks of the disgruntled archers. Stretching himself aloft on his tiptoes, he searched those lines just in time to catch one fleeting glimpse of the familiar figure of none other than Yellow Hand himself. The latter dropped behind some of the files. But now the young Absaroka chieftain had come up and,

in his enthusiasm, disregarded the interpreter, beginning to speak in his own language, at the same time placing a hand on the shoulder of the successful candidate. Queer Person was forced to reply with his hands:

"I do not understand you, but am glad to call you friend." Just the faint semblance of a smile crossed his features, perhaps the first since he had left Singing Moon on that memorable morning.

"Now let me take this child and leave your camp," said Queer Person. The interpreter was at hand, so the Absaroka turned to him in rather a lengthy, subdued conversation. At last the wrinkled one addressed the captive:

"The chief says you are free to go if you wish, but that it is very dangerous. He says there are certain members of a society who have sworn to take your life and scalp, and that a member of your own village, who has been playing into their hands of late, has helped them plan an ambush up the river toward your own people. They have swift horses. We have known all the time that this child is the son of Big Pipe himself." He paused to allow the effect of this to sink into his

listener's mind, but the listener did not so much as change an eyelash.

"We could not prevent the sale of the child by this Yellow Hand, because his friends in this society have great power with some of the older chiefs. There is yet a strong chance for you. You may endure another test, not so dangerous as this one, and if you succeed you will not only be able to escape in absolute safety, but you will gain great honors in the eyes of the Absaroka as well as among your own people. I know the truth and power of my words." Queer Person studied him briefly, then being convinced of his honesty asked:

"And what is this test?"

"You enter it alone, leaving the child with the young chief. There is an ancient war-chief in this village who will die before many days and he has heard of your powerful medicine. He feels it would be honorable to fight you, and if you kill him it will be a brave death and his blood will soak into the ground as the blood of all brave men should. But, if he kills you, then perhaps your great wisdom and strength will enter his own system and he will live a long time. I myself

am a Pikuni—captured many summers back—and have lived with these people so long that it would be folly to leave them. My word is good; I believe in the young chief and shall aid him to return the child in case you do not succeed."

"But I have no weapons," explained Queer Person unwittingly. At this the little interpreter laughed outright and, turning to the young chief and several of his friends who stood near by, translated:

"This man says he has no weapons with which to fight. Do we have any to lend him?" A general titter spread through the listeners, much to the discomfort of the captive, who remained perfectly stolid. "Come."

With this he was led to a very large tepee, evidently that of a society from the decorations. On the beds within was such a gorgeous display of weapons as would cause any warrior to glow with delight, and while our friend was not a trained warrior he was a judge of tools. He was so taken with the array that for a moment he was insensible to the fact that he was there to choose weapons with which to defend his own life. His courage was returning in little waves. On his own

ground and in his own style he felt a high degree of security. This was no matter of slimy buffalo skulls!

The great throng that had followed to this beautiful lodge longed to enter and enjoy the choosing, for by now a tremendous gust of superstition had swept them. This man was something akin to the gods. They crowded the entrance so that the sides of the lodge rocked dangerously and it became necessary for the tribal police to check the ardor in no uncertain terms. They did pull up the pegs, however, and roll the sides of the cover a little way up, in which space a thousand black eyes gleamed with thirsty curiosity.

On the first bed lay rawhide lariats, horsehair lariats, and mixed grass ropes. (It is known that a lariat is an essential article of war, since there is always the chance of roping a loose horse). These were all examined and laid down again. Next came spears, many of them so beautiful that his hands trembled ever so slightly as he lifted them easily one by one. All were as tall as he, some taller; they had bone heads, flint heads, and still others obsidian heads. Some of the

handles were wrapped with strips of otter fur; many bore tufts of small eagle plumes arranged at intervals. These were examined and all laid down again. The thousand eyes turned to whisper:

"He has discarded lariats and spears! He is to fight with knives!" This information floated abroad in a flash.

Then came war-clubs of tremendous variety. In common parlance these are called headache-sticks. What rich people these Crows are! thought the judge of weapons. Stone heads, charred knot heads of cherry wood, pipe-stone heads, bone heads; handles slender, handles stout, handles flexible, decorated and plain, but none held him long; so all were laid down again. A glittering spectacle of knives greeted his gaze, mostly of flint, cleverly chipped, an art that was very close to his own heart. He liked the bone and horn handles better than the fancy ones.

Here he hurried, for in the tail of his eye was the archery equipment, and while his face told nothing his hands and heart were all a-dancing, since this was his very own forte. The owners of the thousand eyes, long since having held their

breath past endurance, gave out the word that he had at last reached the bow and arrows and that it was with these that he intended to fight. The farthest observers began giving way, thinking it time to start for the great arena circle if they intended viewing the spectacle.

And oh! these were so tempting! these beautiful graceful bows and long, straight, nicely feathered arrows. The Crows certainly made beautiful archery things. The same knowing, sensitive hands with slightly upturned finger tips stroked and fondled the long bows for timber hunting, then the short ones for horse work of all sorts. There was only one quiver of mountain-lion skin, like his own old relic made by the long departed Middle Rider. This treasure he never would see again! At last he stood erect, hands on hips, and studied. The onlookers became disgusted. They said aloud:

"This man is no warrior! He is to fight with his hands, like a great bear!"

Just then Queer Person stooped and selected a rather short, heavy bow containing a double letter S in its form, strung it, and tested it lightly. It was made of strips of mountain-sheep horn

glued together and polished down to a glassy surface. From the gorgeous quiver he drew three straight arrows somewhat longer than any others in the whole collection. Turning to the young chief and the interpreter he said:

"I shall fight with these." To the complete amazement of the tall captive the young chieftain touched him on the shoulder and cried:

"You are a brave man! You have chosen my own most prized weapons. They will have greater medicine in them than ever after this day!" The interpreter again came to the rescue. This was the signal for the thousand eyes to disperse, and disperse they did, with a volume of racket.

"He fights with the chief's bow and arrows!"

Another instance of the supernatural in this wonder-man! He chose the chief's ram's horn bow—that most noted weapon known to have brought down much game and many enemies. Why! look at him walk, will you! He has the pride of a great leader. Probably a chief in disguise! And what an athlete he must be, too. Perhaps a famous dancer. Boys stood on the shoulders of their fathers to get a better glimpse. Girls and boys alike mounted horses so as to

out-see their companions. Now and again some person reached out cautiously to touch the flesh of his arms. Truly, things were not doing so badly for this boy-man who had not long since been stone deaf and dumb as a picket pin, nay! had even been termed idiot the better part of his life!

CHAPTER XX

Then the Figure Slid, Bag-like, from the Fleeing Horse

His medicine was smiling. He prayed that it would smile through to the end. Someone offered him some paint to add to his pride.

The camp circle was a large arena, wide enough to race horses. Now it was fenced with a border of people ten to fifteen deep. Sun Pipe was turned over to the wife of the young chief, and Queer Person was ordered to proceed to the center of the open space and wait. As he had never seen so many people together in one group in all his life, to say he was seized with panic and stage fright impoverishes words. Fear he had known and surmounted many times, but this new fear, now that he found himself the cynosure of thousands of minds and twice as many eyes, crippled description. Suffocation was followed by paroxysms of his heart. His knees knocked

and he thought he never would reach the middle.

And yet, to that horde, it appeared only that a tall, graceful young man with the possession of all his faculties was striding easily with fine hip action to his place before them. There was a deal of low talk as he advanced, but at this juncture not one single jeer reached his ears. He did not know that it was because he had struck something like reverence into the hearts of most of them. Reaching what he supposed to be the center, he faced about, a grave creation in bronze. All was still.

Gradually his one-time-poor ears detected the rise and fall of a death chant. It was definitely that of an old man, for the voice was cracked and rasping. It grew in volume. The circle parted to admit a rider. And such a rider! He was perfect! Tall, lean, taking up the motion of his restive horse with great ease, guiding the animal by means of a hackamore and jaw string combined, he started slowly along the margin close to the people. On the rider's head was a huge bonnet of black and white golden-eagle tail feathers with two long streamers of the same feathers that reached down the sides of the

horse nearly to the ground. Many white weasel skins dangled from the sides of the bonnet. His leggings were resplendent in fringes and quill-work, while the moccasins were equally gorgeous. In his left hand the rider carried one of the spears examined by Queer Person so short a time ago, together with a dazzling shield of sun-dance design, which supported a wolf's tail from its center and a lower fringe of eagle feathers. The horse was a wonder! a pinto, black and white, mane and tail braided tightly, and decorated with more eagle plumes. In one white patch on the horse someone had slapped a red hand of paint.

As the rider proceeded it gradually dawned on Queer Person that this man did not ride like a patriarch: he managed himself and horse like a young and vigorous warrior. Could it be that some treacherous scheme was being perpetrated here? That might be the young chieftain himself! Granny had always warned him against dealings with these people. The mere thought set his ears to pounding as they did in the days when those same ears were making their first sickly attempts

to gather in sounds from the confusion in his environment.

Then to his immense relief his shaking ceased, his sight became keen, and his ears were sharp as those of a deer. Truth is, his ire was rising. If this was the young chief, then who was that back there with Sun Pipe? For one fleeting moment he tore his eyes from the rider and studied the spot where he had left the little boy. It was too far for certain identification; besides, he had no time for conjecture now, only action. Fifty notions entered his head, and he set aside exactly fifty. His anger was now sufficient to succor him through deeds he only imagined heretofore.

The dancing horse was nearing the point of entrance, when, like a perfectly trained war-horse, he wheeled in the direction of the lone archer and charged, an incarnate thunderbolt personified! His ears were laid back and he came at such speed that he seemed only a little above the earth. The rider, whose feathered headgear was snapping in the wind, had shifted his spear to his right hand, the shield to the left, thus covering his chest, while the animal was turned

loose to his own dictates, which through training had come to be those of his master.

Dropping to one knee, an arrow nocked in readiness, Queer Person trained his sight on the rider, all the time holding himself in readiness for a spring to one side or the other as the case might demand. Just as the mounted warrior was about to drive through him, the spear was released.

As the horse dashed past the arrow flew.

Queer Person dodged low enough to escape the spear itself, but not to avoid being slapped in the eyes with a tassel of the feather decorations, which blinded his sight and instantly started tears of pain streaming down his face. Mechanically, like a semiblind man, he was nocking another arrow, when he heard the war-cry of the rider broken in the middle by a deep, liquid gurgle, the most welcome sound his recently found ears had collected! Dimly he saw the arms of his opponent lifted high; then the figure slid baglike from the fleeing horse. The breathless crowd saw the fallen man turn on his face, draw up one leg, close and relax one hand, and all was over. Queer Person waited in readiness to loose a

second shaft, but, finding it unnecessary, walked back to where he had left Sun Pipe.

There stood the young chief, admiration beaming from his countenance. The Blackfoot stared from the living to the dead, once more bewildered. Had the victim been an old man, after all? Oh, Suspicion, what trickery lies in thy name!

Queer Person had regained his sight, but his smarting eyes still blinked. Addressing the young chief, he said:

"I have completed both your tests and my medicine has been good; so now let me take the child and depart." The little interpreter sang out in perfect amazement:

"Aren't you going to take the trophies?" The trophies? Was he entitled to trophies? Glancing again at the prostrate figure in the field, he realized the meaning of the question. Handing back the bow and the two spare arrows, he walked back to the scene of his battle. The arrow had pierced entirely through the thorax of the enemy, for the feathers touched the flesh on one side, the point appeared on the other. That was a powerful little bow! As yet, he had not glimpsed the face of his antagonist; so when he turned the

body over with his foot it was with genuine surprise that he gazed on the dead countenance. He peered through the paint. It was, indeed, the face of a very old man. He studied it, this face of his first war victim. Something that he took to be mere repugnance for death ran down through his being.

Then, realizing he must hurry, he untied the jaw string, removed the headgear, took off the belt with its trappings, stripped off the leggings and moccasins. Walking over to where the shield had fallen, he experienced a glow of joy in its beauty. He pulled the spear out of the ground where it had stood quivering from the impact, as though angry after missing the target. Once more, standing before the chieftain, he signified that he was ready. The Absaroka signed:

"Aren't you going to take the horse?" The speed with which Queer Person laid aside his armful of finery and weapons amounted to alacrity, for if that horse was to be his there was little doubt about his escaping from this place with the little boy. The confidence with which he gathered up the long leash rope on the hackamore together with the accompanying sound in

his throat used by Indian horse trainers proved to the near-by spectators that he was also a horseman of no small caliber. Once he had smoothed the velvety muzzle of the high-spirited beast, he found no difficulty in mounting. So for the last time he traveled this short war-trail from the scene of his first killing. Receiving his trophies again, Queer Person tied the bonnet on his head, threw the leggings, moccasins, and his robe over the horse's withers, gathered the spear and shield in his left hand, and reached to lift Sun Pipe.

The interpreter detained him with a slightly raised hand. Just then the throng parted to admit a herdsboy leading three horses. The leash of a fine, gentle, black mare was placed in the hand of the little boy, who looked up at Queer Person as though asking if this were proper. Someone lifted him clear of the ground to the back of his gift, where he stuck like a burr, having wound his fingers in the mane of the beast. He signified that he was ready, assuming that of course they would leave at top speed from such a place of horrors. The young chief and the interpreter mounted, likewise, and guided them slowly

away from the village. Their trail led directly past the historical butte, but Queer Person said not a word about it, having come to feel that his buried treasure up there was a sacrifice that had been partly responsible for his success. Once away from the people and their cries of praise, the little old kinsman of these two liberated Pikuni wore an expression so somber that it gave no possible clue to the quality of his reminiscences. He reined his horse against that of Queer Person, and without turning his head spoke in a soft tone:

"We are being watched from the brush along the trail. Keep your eyes straight forward. Listen but do not answer except when necessary. There are things I must tell you and also things I must learn from you." They rode on a few paces before more was said. "There is a band of killers awaiting you, among them this Yellow Hand. I shall tell you when it is safe to turn off and cut into the hills. You must make a dry camp somewhere over yonder mesa, and you yet have time before dark to cover much country. Do not sleep yourself, but let the boy sleep."

"I hear and know all you say," said Queer Person quietly, "for I, too, have seen the spies in the brush." Meantime, the interpreter had studied a deep, irregular scar on the shoulder of the younger man, and at last he reached out and tapped it gently with two fingers.

"Who are you? Do you know who you are? How long have you had that scar?"

"I am nobody," answered Queer Person, "for I was merely found. It was in the winter. I dimly remember waking up after a long ride and finding myself walking in cold snow. An old, old woman raised me." Suddenly the old man clapped his hand over his mouth at this information. In fact, he fell into rather violent agitation. Almost in fear he whispered his next question:

"Were you—were you ever deaf?" This time Queer Person could not refrain from facing his interlocutor.

"I was. For sixteen winters I did not hear nor speak as you and I do now." It was evident that the little man was about to call the young chief to a halt, but thought better of it and simply commanded to his listener:

"Keep riding. Do not change your face when you hear me. I know exactly who you are now. I'll tell. Many winters back your father was a famous warrior. He became a chief. Once after a raid on your people when they were on the trail he captured your mother who was a young girl. Another Absaroka claimed her as his, but your father refused to yield her to Black Weasel, so was kind to her and later made her his wife. Black Weasel tried many moons to get your father to gamble with him, and at last, angry, your father entered the game. Black Weasel had a forked tongue and all night your father lost steadily, until at dawn he had no horses, no weapons, no tepees. His enemy dared him to bet the woman, and, in a frenzy, he did so and lost. She was told by women friends who saw the game, so entered her lodge alone with you as a little babe in her arms; no one saw.

"After the game Black Weasel arose and went to the lodge to claim all. Your father followed and entered behind him. You were lying on the ground with your shoulder against a hot rock in the edge of the fire. She was rolled in the

bedding, her face turned away. Like lightning your father stabbed Black Weasel again and again until he fell bleeding across the hearth. Then your father picked you up in his arms and said to the woman: 'Do not fear longer, my woman, I have killed our enemy, Black Weasel.' He got no answer, so knelt and turned her over. She was dead. Had thrown herself on her knife and it was in her heart. You were kept in the camp for a long time, and when you were four winters old we all knew you were deaf and dumb. Somebody started a story that it was because your father had gambled away your mother, and that you contained the evil spirit of Black Weasel after that; so they took you away in a great storm and placed you in the camp of your mother's people, not daring to kill you lest some awful thing happen to the Crows."

Queer Person's head was bowed, and except for his tightly gripped hand on the spear, where his knuckles showed white, his emotion was not suspected.

"And now," continued the little wizened one, "I have to tell you who the old chieftain was

that you killed in battle." This was too much; the young man pulled his steed to his haunches in an iron grasp, almost upsetting both Sun Pipe and the young Crow chieftain.

"Don't tell me that was my father?" he rasped.

"None other."

The young chief had been preoccupied, watching for dangers from the bloodthirsty ones whom he saw leaving the brush from time to time to carry word to the ambushers ahead. Seeing the excitement and not knowing what caused it he was totally unprepared for what happened. He cried out:

"Ride! Yonder crossing through the deep ford and out on the mesa!"

At the same time he pointed to the two riders and then brought a quirt down with a mighty crash over the flank of the little boy's mare. Lucky that the child had a strong grip, for his mount leaped into a narrow side trail after the speeding pinto, and in an instant they were plowing through the deep water of the river. Out they climbed in a steep cut made years ago by buffalo. They gained the wide approach to

the mesa. Just as Queer Person suspected; there were Yellow Hand and his accomplices riding like mad to head off the two fugitives. The murderers had been informed that some plot was developing, but again they were deprived of their chances for treachery.

Being on high ground, the race was now in full view of the whole Crow camp, where excitement was high. None were more interested spectators than the young chief and the old interpreter. The young leader was half in mind to call about him some of his fraternity brothers and ride to a battle with some of his own tribesmen. Some of the older chiefs counseled against it. It was beneath him to battle with one so low as Yellow Hand. By now it was evident that the pinto and the black mare were gaining rapidly, and the biggest share of the camp broke forth in yells of joy, for this wonder worker was carrying away in friendship over half their hearts. Some were with him in a far deeper emotion than mere friendship, if it must be told.

"They will make it! they will make it!" cried the little dried-up specimen of the Pikuni tribe

to his superior. "They have the two fastest horses in camp and his medicine is good."

Far on top of the horizon they saw Queer Person turn for one last look at that fateful valley, then become swallowed by the great land toward the mountains.

JUST AS THE MOUNTED WARRIOR WAS ABOUT TO DRIVE THROUGH HIM, THE SPEAR WAS RELEASED

CHAPTER XXI

The Picket on the Horizon

When his pursuers reached the top of the valley they saw plainly their defeat, for the Pikuni riders were far over the flat, and some of the Crows admitted that the two best horses they had in camp were ahead of them.

According to directions, a dry camp was made sometime after nightfall. The horses were picketed, the trailing bonnet laid aside, then the tall boy-man wrapped the tired little Pipe in the one robe between them, and laid him in the sage. Being wrapped in the robe and falling asleep were one action to this child of seven winters with his overwrought nerves. Turning now to his great night world and his stars, Queer Person at last felt himself alone with his thoughts. The glowing sense of joy that had swelled within him as they rode away from the arena was quite eclipsed by the shocking news that he had killed

his own father in battle! He was not sure whether he wanted to call it justice or not. Grief for the spirit of the long dead mother and the brave old father struggled for supremacy in his torn heart. At any rate, the spirit of his mother had managed to come back through a Nemesis, sure and certain, for his father through himself.

Through sheer courage, aching as he was with fatigue, he refrained from even sitting down. In fact, he walked the whole livelong night through! Once the horses raised their heads to pierce the darkness with their super senses, but the disturbance proved to be only a band of curious antelope who had come up to see who had built this wee camp in their wide domain. Toward morning three gray wolves came to sit on their haunches a little way off and study this man-brother who paced so ceaselessly in the sage.

The dawn of that day promised such gifts as perhaps no other day in the lives of either of the two. It was a hollow-eyed but eager Queer Person who lifted the boy to his perch on the black mare. At the first stream both men and beasts drank deep refreshing draughts. The

place seemed too peaceful to leave, but these wayfarers knew full well they were on no ordinary jaunt for their health. It was real work and business of travel for them. So they maintained courage and pressed on. When buttes and cut banks began to cast long shadows across the flats, they arrived at the edge of a huge basin which marked the southern boundary of the Pikuni hunting ground. They were really home now! Their spirits rose. The child joined the man in short yelps of delight.

It was so far across this basin that the dried alkali lakes with their salt-frosted rims looked like flat craters. The prairie within it was forested with tall sage and greasewood. Horses and buffalo would look equally like tiny dots on the other side of this area. Away across it was a flat-topped butte where their people always maintained a picket.

Now it was necessary to get into communication with this picket if one expected to enter camp in safety, especially with any sort of show. Otherwise there was real danger of being killed by some of their own people in attempting to cross the lines. Having contracted a greed for

respectability, Queer Person longed to enter the village in state. So the tired horses were prodded on to a little sharper gait lest darkness overtake them, and it become necessary to remain out another night.

At last the two approached the base of the aforesaid prominence and dismounted in the sage where cover was deepest. A picket had been seen from away back, to be sure, and it was natural that he should have melted away out of sight at the approach of strangers. Leaving the great bonnet with the boy, the warrior stole carefully around the rocky base, when suddenly he spied the corner of a blue robe that was known to belong to none other than Big Pipe himself. It had been acquired from a neighboring tribe, who had in turn traded for it from some of the mysterious white men. Could Big Pipe himself be out on guard? It was probable, since the poor old man was distraught and wanted to seek privacy for his grief. Ghostlike, Queer Person settled himself into the sage to watch. After an interval there was a slight movement on the part of the unknown picket, who presently arose and peered about. Queer Person's pulse quick-

ened madly, for this picket proved to be a woman! None other than Singing Moon herself! She stood with hand shading her brow and eyes, one wisp of hair blowing across her saddened face. How thin and worn she looked, bless her! Perhaps part of it was because of him. He offered up the tiniest of prayers, rather a selfish little prayer at that.

Her roaming eyes had settled on him at last, only it was such a small portion of his person she saw that he could not be identified. She evidently considered him an enemy, for her hand deliberately sought her knife hilt. Only his brow and eyes were apparent over the top of the sage, and there still being a generous quantity of paint on his countenance she was greatly alarmed. Slowly he raised his gaunt height, causing her to shrink back in fear. Of course, she did not recognize him; how could she? His hair was parted on the side and swept back into a great mop over his left ear. The part was painted yellow like a Crow, and he had braided a generous scalp-lock now that he had become a full-fledged warrior. But he flashed his white teeth, even the one bearing the nick. She was too overcome even to

smile and, supposing he had nothing to do with the two riders, motioned him to be cautious, at the same time whispering softly:

"Sheeeeeee! Did you see two riders go by?" His face straightened. His sense of play and acting came to the foreground at once.

"Yes, where did they go?" he asked. She motioned around the butte. So these two lovers settled to their hands and knees and proceeded to crawl through the sage for some little distance. Soon the dejected horses with hanging heads were visible. Half impatient and half overcome with excitement, the girl leaped to her feet and dashed toward the now erect man, wildly sobbing in broken tones. She pounded him futilely on the chest, demanding:

"Where is he? My brother, the boy chief? Tell me! I know by your face that you brought him." The very boy in question could stand it no longer and was flying as fast as his tired, thin little legs could transport him to that beloved sister who was almost a mother to him. He wailed at every step! This sound sent a stabbing pain down through the entire nervous system of the tall warrior, for it was the selfsame sound

he had heard coming from that hated sun-dance pole of the Crows!

No more erroneous teaching was ever launched than the one making the red people stoical and unemotional. They suffer and give vent to grief quite as deliberately as other races, only perhaps in a more sincere style.

Thus it was that this tired, exhausted girl gathered the worn-out child in her arms, and being unable to stand they both sank to the ground. Singing Moon rocked the precious burden to and fro, giving herself over to all the pent-up torrent that had sought to break her reserve these many days. She cried the child's name over and over, like an insane person. At last she grew more quiet, her sobs having settled to the dry uncontrollable sort. Her eyes closed, and she remained with her cheek pressed against the face of the child a long while. The storm had passed.

During this time Queer Person stood motionless, his drawn face square in the last rays of the setting sun, his unseeing eyes on the horizon. In time he felt her gaze on him, yet did not move. It was a prayer that held him, the best one of

his young life. Then slowly he turned his face toward her, the eyes remaining averted to the dying sun. Even they drifted softly to her tear-stained face at last. A deeper woodland shadow shone in those eyes than was their custom. He, too, was tired, thin, and worn. Her eyes closed again, and a soft moccasin pat in the sand warned her of his approach. Then she felt his great arms about her and the half-unconscious boy.

There had always been love, protection, and happiness in her own home, with her father at the head. Far less than most of the girls in camp had she been exposed to rigorous dangers and needs. Was she not the chieftain's daughter? The recent period of exhausting anxiety and grief was her first great trial, her first taste of this world's madness.

But, now, what was this all-powerful calm and solace that swept her up and away beyond the skies as she felt herself and the little brother enclosed in these strong arms? She knew he was kneeling, for now his head was bowed and his face was hidden in the curve of her neck. His deep, calm breath was warm against her throat. How quiet he was. How kindly, and yet he must

have come just now from deeds of war, else how did he gain all these wonderful things and horses? His would be a great story. She longed to hear every word, yet, knowing him as she did, realized he would never tell it all at once. It might be many moons before this shy, retiring warrior would reveal all those details that only she as his sweetheart could hope to know. The new equipment spoke volumes; it fairly shouted! She opened her eyes to gaze down at his clasped hands on her shoulders. These were the speaking hands of her warrior lover. In a sense she came to feel as he himself did about those double-purpose hands. Timidly she placed an index finger on the back of the nearest one.

"Is this mine, now?" she whispered half playfully and half wistfully. And so he kissed her for the first time.

The trio rested not long, however, for darkness was near and all needed rest. At last she whispered that old, old Indian phrase of complete submission:

"Lead thou on and I shall follow!" To him this meant that she was utterly happy in his devotion and his only. It was a joyful and half-

playful grin that greeted her from across the black mare's back when he brought up that animal for her and the boy to mount. In the middle of the river he turned to flash the broken tooth at her once more before they entered the public gaze.

"Come, be honest; did you not feel sorry for me when I left?" he asked. She looked away, delayed, angled for time. Then, in tones like the dripping of water in a far-off dell, she replied:

"You looked so lonely, and I had never seen anyone leave on the old-time war trail. And——" she paused.

"Yes?" he asked reassuringly.

"You would not look back."

"Then you came out to watch me leave?"

"Yes."

"Can't we hurry, Sister?" asked the weariest of child's voices.

"Yes, we shall hurry, thou cricket! Did you help get that great bonnet and these fine horses?" This in a playful tone. "But we must get to Mother and Father now. They are both sick in the tepee, and some day you shall tell me what happened to you, Little Chief." She splashed

water on the pinto and caused him to lunge forward, which deed gained another view of the broken tooth. Time was when this man expressed so little mirth and hilarity, that now even his smile was enough to make her want to cry. And this smile seemed to darken the shadows of his "seeing-eyes" almost to mystery. That's what he was! He was her mystery warrior! A new name!

Straight to Big Pipe's lodge they rode. Granny was standing at the entrance. She took root: simply stood and stared. It was only a moment, for a great, wild cry broke from her throat.

"My boy! my son is back with the little chief!" This announcement electrified the village, and in an instant they were surrounded with familiar faces, eager and animated. Confusion and chatter grew wilder. The little chief was placed in the great lodge, the door-cloth pulled down, two sticks crossed over it, and Singing Moon walked away to the lodge of some friend, while the resplendent warrior hero led the two horses to Granny's lodge, picketed them in deep grass near by, and entered the precious ragged old domicile. Briefly he related the skeleton of the story to Granny, handed over the recently

acquired paraphernalia, and stretched out to almost instant sleep on his couch of robes.

Granny lost no time, not she! A tripod was set up in front of her mean tepee and the trailing bonnet, leggings, moccasins, spear, and shield were displayed that all the world might know a great warrior made his home there. She built a big fire to illuminate the trophies and horses. People came and went all the night long, and to all she related the story, improving on it where she thought it needed it, until there was one name breathed from all lips in camp: Queer Person. With the wisdom of Indians, and old ones at that, Granny covered the celebrity with a robe as the chill of the prairie night crept into camp. She knew full well it was better for him to sleep before he ate.

Next night a council was held in the camp arena, a council so big that none remembered any like it. Everybody came. Four fires were kindled, one for each wind, and tobacco with other sacred incense was burned by old Crane's Talk in each one. The headmen and old chiefs were seated on the west side of the circle. Presently Big Pipe in all his ceremonial splendor

walked royally to the seat of honor, plying his historic fan as he strode forward. In a short while the chief was seen to motion someone in the crowd to come forward, at the same time making room in the circle. All eyes turned to see old Granny limping forward on her staff to join the head leaders of her people. A volume of cheers arose for this old soul whose wisdom and foresight had pierced the future so many years ago and caused her to rear one of the greatest warriors in the history of the Pikuni. Soon followed the little chief, Sun Pipe, who cast furtive and half-frightened glances about him as he tried so hard to walk bravely across the arena. Unable to bear the stage fright he broke into a run and flew to his father's open arms. Much laughter arose on all sides, and then the crowd called out wildly:

"Sun Pipe! Sun Pipe! Our little chief!"

Finally a hush fell upon the whole assemblage. Someone most unusual was approaching. He appeared in the firelight at last, tall, very lean, dignified. He wore a magnificent two-tailed bonnet of black-white plumes. In his left hand he carried a pipe bag beautiful and old, evidently

a gift, for the man was young. And in his right hand he carried a chieftain's fan. It was the now famous Queer Person.

He was halfway across the arena before a single sound broke from the throng, and then it was fiercely tumultuous. Long after this newly appointed sub-chieftain of the Pikuni had taken his place among the authorities the racket continued. Big Pipe was hard put to silence their enthusiasm before he might proceed. Many speeches followed; some so long that the little people grew hopelessly weary. Then arose Queer Person himself to tell his story briefly. The crowd was wild to hear it from his own lips. This audience was especially anxious to hear him, having always known him as deaf and dumb. His opening sentences caused them to marvel at his volume of voice, and they were not insensible to the marked accent with which he spoke. Few understood the physiological cause of this accent, while most of them unthinkingly attributed it to his being half Crow, thanks to Granny's advertising. Truth is, most of them forgot to breathe, and the mass of eager eyes caused the young speaker to recall the thousand

eyes who watched him select Crow weapons for his famous battle. We shall record only the last part of his speech.

"I am glad my people have come to love me. Queer Person was long despised. It was hard to be brave and believe the words of our mother, Granny, during those four winters and thus learn to talk, but my medicine was good and the trail of honor and pride was laid open to me.

"In a dream my own father spoke to me many moons back. He said I should one day slay him and that it would be good. I did not understand then but now all is clear. Once he was our enemy and he recognized me that morning I was captured by the Crows. I know it now. He attended the council when I was tried and learned for certain who I was. His life had been so bitter and his loss so great that his only happiness was to die at the hands of the son he had wronged. The Pikuni interpreter in the Crow camp, whom Crane's Talk knew very well long winters past, knew all the time and helped lead me into the contest. My own father did not intend to kill his son but was happy to have his son be the cause of his own death. This makes my heart

blue. The bonnet I wear came from the deeds of my own father. I know it. Queer Person has spoken."

The speaker's last words were instantly followed by the clatter of many horses' hoofs, for here came into the aerna a whole herd of horses as though called by the spirit of the council instead of being urged on by clever herdsboys as was the actual case. Looking sharply at the herd the crowd recognized many of the chieftain's own animals, and so knew these were the forty horses offered by Big Pipe to the rescuer of the little chief. Some sharp-eyed girls in a group to one side called out:

"Hist! Look, look!"

Turning, the people saw the slender figure of a woman standing high on a scaffold of poles. Her beautiful white gown gleamed in the firelight. It was Singing Moon. Her voice rang out clear and bell-like in the night air.

"To-night Singing Moon holds her first 'Gives-it-away Party.' The owner of these horses has given them to me and I, in turn, call the poor and needy before me to present these gifts. In the name of our little chief, Sun Pipe, whose

return to our camp has given us new life, I give this fine, sorrel mare to old Granny." But, strangely, Granny had disappeared and was, for the moment, nowhere to be found. The dispenser of gifts proceeded on to others, until the last horse was given away. Reluctantly the gathering dissolved and went their various ways, talking excitedly of recent events.

Shortly after reaching her father's now happy lodge, Singing Moon sought Granny. She called again and again.

"She is down by the river!" replied Queer Person from the interior of Granny's lodge. So down that memorable trail through the timber flew the girl. At the water's edge she saw dimly the familiar, bent old figure, busy with her hands in the water.

"Did you see Yellow-Hand there to-night?" asked Granny.

"No, but I heard him laugh."

"Well, you will never hear him laugh again." Here she revealed that she was washing her hands and her knife, the very knife she always used for butchering. The girl clapped her hand over her mouth in alarm. "Never mind," con-

tinued the old woman, "some day I shall tell you a story about coyote bait."

"Have you—have you knifed him? Is he dead?"

"Child, I said s-o-m-e d-a-y. That is not now."

Singing Moon gasped, grew faint and sat on the ground.

CHAPTER XXII

That New, White Lodge

A NUMBER of things happened next day.

First, along in the middle of the afternoon a group of women were seen to set up a beautiful new white lodge a short distance outside the village. The work was being performed under the able direction of old Granny. A tripod bearing the Crow shield and flowing bonnet was erected out in front. Women from throughout the camp carried robes, richly decorated parfleches containing food, and other gifts over and placed them within.

Lastly, dignified old men together with their warrior sons led horses to this new lodge and picketed them before its entrance. A herdsboy had staked out the black and white pinto among this growing herd.

Goes-before and Sun Pipe were seated under a broad cottonwood watching the proceedings

from a distance. Someone had placed robes and a willow backrest in the shade that the recuperating mother might enjoy the beautiful autumn day more fully.

"Granny has carried all the things of Queer Person's journey over to that new lodge," remarked the little fellow. "Why did she do that, Mother?"

"That is to show the world who lives there, my son," was the reply.

"And what are all those horses over there for? Are they going off to war again?"

"No, those are gifts for Queer Person because they love him."

"There is Queer Person, now, going to the old lodge, Mother. Why don't you speak to him?"

"Because, my son, there is a custom among our people that forbids a woman to speak to her son-in-law. But I love him as a son and someday I shall talk to him when he is alone." The boy grew thoughtful. This was not easy to digest. Then suddenly his face glowed.

"Mother, do they call me little chief just because they know my father is a big one, or is it because I really am a little chief?"

"Son, it is because you have the spirit of a real chief. Some day you will carry your father's fan to the council." Kaleidoscopic lights and changes played over the noble little countenance. Then he said half to himself as he tied and untied the long fringes on the shoulder of her gown:

"I love my black horse from Crow-land. She is very easy and gentle." But the quick wit of the mother had caught the mood as well as the thought of her precious one. She waited to learn his complete plan, however. He must work it out alone, for this would make him a man. Presently he continued:

"Great chieftains give away many things, don't they, Mother? They give nice things to those they love instead of talking so much. Sister said this about Father a long time ago before I went away." And still the mother waited. Slowly the little figure withdrew from her and walked away. In a short while, just as Goes-before had surmised, the boy was seen sturdily leading his one and only earthly possession, the gentle black mare, over to the new white lodge where he bravely drove the picket pin in the ground. People pretended not to see, but, as a

matter of fact, every woman busy at that lodge had caught that bit of drama being played by the child to its fifth act. Soon he was standing with his mother again.

"That was a brave deed, my son," she said as she drew him close with one frail arm. Tears stood on his lashes, and she fought back the quaver in her own voice. "That is what makes chieftains great among their own people."

"And, see, there goes Granny back to the little tepee now. Why does she walk so slowly, Mother? And will Granny and that old dog be lonesome in the little lodge when Queer Person does not live there?"

And, dear reader, were we there in person with that wistful child and his frail mother we might have heard the old woman say to herself, as she wended her way toward that raggedest of lodges:

"He was worth saving; he was worth stealing! He is not gone. I needn't feel so bad. And to think! Humph! They called him an idiot!"

THE END